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**An Examination of Senior Public Relations Practitioners’
Power and Influence Among Multiple Executive-Level Coalitions**

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Power and Influence Among Multiple Executive-Level Coalitions

by
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Dissertation

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of
The University of Texas at Austin
in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements
for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

The University of Texas at Austin

August 2012

Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to my husband, Terry, who provided encouragement and endured the sacrifices that were required to achieve this milestone. I also want to thank my in-laws, Bob, Frances, Robin and Craig, who supported me throughout the process in substantial ways. I also want to acknowledge my parents, John and Ruth, for their contributions to my earlier educational pursuits and moral support as I pursued additional degrees. A special thank you to my brother, Steven, and sister-in-law, Rachel, along with other family members, friends and colleagues who offered their prayers and support. I truly am blessed and thank God for all of you. Among the strongest supporters were Dr. Richard and Terry Scott, Dr. Barbara Chessner, and Charles and Retha Bass, who regularly asked for progress updates.

I would also like to express my appreciation to my former coworkers at the city of Waco who demonstrated their friendship and support during a farewell party. I will never forget your generosity; the KU piggy bank in my home office serves as a constant reminder.

I also would like to acknowledge my mentors Gene Hall, PRSA Fellow, APR; and Blake Lewis, PRSA Fellow, APR, who wrote letters of recommendation for my admission into the doctoral program and assisted with the recruitment of volunteers for my doctoral research projects. I appreciate the counsel both of you have provided for my career, and the way you have modeled and advocated for the ethical practice of public relations.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my coursework and dissertation committee members for their counsel and encouragement: Dr. Minette Drumwright, Dr. Renita Coleman, Dr. Lee Ann Kahlor, Dr. Brad Love, Dr. Kathleen Mackie, Dr. Norvell Northcutt, Dr. Keri Stephens and Dr. Jerome Williams. A special thanks to Dr. Drumwright for serving as my faculty adviser from the very beginning of the doctoral program – I truly consider you a mentor and friend and I especially valued how you demonstrated the connection between teaching and research in the classroom. As I transition to the position of a full time educator, I want to thank Dr. Coleman, Dr. Kahlor, Dr. Mackie, Dr. Northcutt, and Dr. Stephens for demonstrating excellence in teaching; I feel privileged to have had the opportunity to learn from each of you through courses or independent studies. I would also like to thank Dr. Gary Wilcox for providing counsel and encouragement throughout the doctoral program, and Dr. Dave Junker, who I had the opportunity to serve and learn from as a teaching assistant for two years.

I would also like to thank Dean Terry Maness of Baylor University for providing referrals for my dissertation research, as well as Baylor alumni and former interns of mine who helped to open doors.

Finally, I am grateful for the executives who agreed to be interviewed for this study. I value the insights from your companies and the specific examples each of you described and look forward to sharing the lessons with my students and public relations practitioners.

Seat at the Table(s):

An Examination of Senior Public Relations Practitioners’

Power and Influence Among Multiple Executive-Level Coalitions

Marlene Sue Neill, Ph.D.

The University of Texas at Austin, 2012

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Scholars have advocated that public relations executives need to seek a seat at the table among the most senior officers in the organization, referred to as the dominant coalition. However, this study found that public relations practitioners also need to seek a seat among the division leadership team and executive-level committees to fulfill a valuable internal boundary spanning role, a role that has been neglected in public relations theory. Consistent with social capital theory, the contacts that public relations practitioners developed allowed them to gather intelligence across the company and then they used that information to help their companies make better strategic decisions and avoid costly mistakes. Through in-depth interviews with 30 senior executives from a variety of disciplines, three other services were identified that enhanced public relations’ power and influence: online reputation management, external boundary spanning and advocacy, and stakeholder analysis. Factors that enhanced or hindered public relations practitioners’ ability to perform these services were also identified. Favorable conditions included the use of integrated decision teams, Theory Y management, perceptions of public relations as a strategic business partner, commitment to transparency in communication, internal relationship building, and the integration of public relations’

activities with core business objectives and operations. The study also examined why informal coalitions are formed and found they existed in both companies with strong adherence to hierarchy and those with decentralized management, a finding that contradicts previous theory.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Scholars have found excellence in public relations is dependent on the department's membership or access to the dominant coalition, "the group of individuals within the organization who have the power to determine its mission and goals" (Grunig, Grunig & Dozier, 2002, p. 141, 240-241), but public relations practitioners are seldom members of the dominant coalition (Berger, 2005; Moss, Warnaby & Newman, 2000). Even if they do gain a seat at the table of the dominant coalition, Scott (1981) pointed out that admission alone is an "empty victory" if the new member lacks influence among other senior leaders (p. 270). In reality, the presence of public relations executives at the senior executive table can best be described as a revolving door. Bowen (2009) found the most common route to membership in the dominant coalition is a crisis situation, but membership was only temporary and ended following the crisis.

While public relations managers can provide valuable communication counsel during crisis situations, they can also play an indispensable strategic role by helping organizations avoid crises, a distinction that has been described by practitioners as fire prevention rather than firefighting (Berger & Reber, 2005). Public relations practitioners gain insight through research called environmental scanning; they "scan their environment to identify stakeholders who are affected by potential organizational decisions or who want organizations to solve problems that are important to them" (Grunig, 2006, p. 159). As such, they span the boundary between the organization and its external publics. In this boundary spanning role, public relations managers summarize and interpret the information (Aldrich & Herker, 1977), and then counsel senior management regarding the potential public reaction to policies and how those policies could be revised to address the public interest (Grunig & Hunt, 1984). Grunig (2006)

wrote that environmental scanning by public relations professionals contributes to the bottom line through “reduced costs of litigation, regulation, legislation, and negative publicity caused by poor relationships...or increased revenue by providing products and services needed by stakeholders” (p. 159).

While, marketing professionals also conduct research to understand the needs of stakeholders, scholars asserted that marketing professionals have a tendency to limit their analysis to the concerns of customers, a condition Smith, Drumwright and Gentile (2010) referred to as the “new marketing myopia.” In contrast, public relations professionals have a broader view of stakeholders, which is consistent with Freeman’s definition, “any group or individual who can affect or is affected by the achievement of the organization’s objectives” (Freeman, 1984, p. 46). Through in-depth interviews, Grunig and Grunig (1998) found CEOs valued public relations for its broad view of the environment, which includes research and analysis of the concerns of both internal and external stakeholders. The list of stakeholders considered by public relations managers often includes the community, employees, legislators and stockholders (Wilcox, Cameron, Ault, & Agee, 2003). A potential barrier to this broader stakeholder analysis is the movement towards integrated communication, which typically involves an organizational hierarchy where public relations serves as a subsection of marketing, which has been highly touted as “speaking with one voice,” but Grunig and Grunig (1998) said that the weakness of this approach is the organization “suffers the disadvantage of listening with one ear” (p. 158).

Public relations scholars have given significant attention to the issue of how senior public relations executives can obtain and maintain a seat at the table among the dominant coalition, often called the C-suite due to the presence of executives with titles such as the chief executive officer, chief financial officer and chief marketing officer. Most of this research has focused on access to a single formal dominant coalition

(Bowen, 2009; Moss et al., 2000) or relationships with one other function such as marketing (Lauzen, 1991; Lauzen & Dozier, 1992; Lauzen, 1992) or legal (Fitzpatrick & Rubin, 1995; Lee, Jares & Heath, 1999; Reber, Cropp, & Cameron, 2001).

While most research has assumed the existence of one dominant coalition, Berger (2005) suggested that organizations likely include multiple coalitions including formal and informal committees formed on a contingency basis that meet at a range of venues including golf courses and airports. Since scholars have said public relations is typically excluded from the formal dominant coalition, it is critical to understand public relations' access to informal coalitions as a means to increase its power and influence at the senior executive-level. A key question that deserves attention is what role do informal coalitions play, if any, for public relations executives seeking more power and influence at the senior executive level? Stevenson, Pearce and Porter (1985) described several characteristics of coalitions including a specific purpose, a temporal existence, informal influence among members, and action as a group. Scott (1981) suggested that "coalition members seek out other groups whose interests are similar as allies, and they negotiate with groups whose interests are divergent but whose participation is necessary" (p. 264). The invitation to participate in these informal coalitions can often be based on interpersonal relationships and social influence. The creation of informal coalitions is consistent with the natural system perspective of organizations, which suggests that individuals in the organization vary in power based on resources such as intelligence, motivation, training and skills (Scott, 1981), and possession of these resources can override formal power structures. In support of this theory, Moss et al. (2000) found that public relations' access to the dominant coalition was associated with the personal credibility and standing of the individual practitioner, and perceptions of the quality of their work and expertise.

Although these studies provide insight into situational factors that may influence access to the dominant coalition, additional research is needed to examine interpersonal and organizational structural factors that impact public relations executives' influence among other senior executives. Research should specifically examine the relationships between the senior public relations officer and other senior executives such as brand or division presidents, and vice presidents of marketing, finance, human resources, investor relations and operations who often work together as a team on strategic issues. Berger (2005) has called for additional research and suggested that "the literature is meager regarding what happens in the group, how it happens, and what the implications are for public relations managers" (p. 8). A central question to answer is what are the perceptions of the members of the senior leadership regarding the role of public relations and is there congruency and consensus among these perceptions? Even the public relations industry has struggled to define its domain, recently using a crowd sourcing approach to develop a new definition.¹

The possibility of the existence of multiple dominant coalitions adds additional complexity to the issues of public relations' power and influence. The goal of this research is to better understand public relations' participation in senior executive coalitions, especially informal coalitions. In-depth interviews were conducted with senior officers representing multiple departments in four U.S. companies that varied on a number of dimensions likely to affect the power and influence of public relations. The research questions framing this study are the following:

¹ As evidence, see the PRSA blog on defining public relations (<http://prdefinition.prsa.org/index.php/2012/01/11/candidates-for-a-modern-definition-of-public-relations/>), which was instituted because there is no de facto definition of the field and extant definitions are insufficient.

How do public relations executives successfully gain power and influence at the senior executive-level? What factors enhance or hinder public relations' power and influence? What role do informal coalitions play for public relations at the senior executive-level?

Chapter 2 reviews research relevant to this study that provides the theoretical underpinnings. Then Chapter 3 describes the research methodology. Chapter 4 introduces the key findings of the study. Chapter 5 is a discussion of findings and provides implications for educators and professionals as well as recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This chapter begins with a discussion of how scholars define the normative or excellent role of public relations, which requires that public relations be a member of the senior executive leadership team, referred to as the dominant coalition. Membership on the leadership team would be an example of formal power and authority. While this is considered the ideal, it is also appropriate to examine the potential barriers and limitations to achieving excellence, such as organizational power conflicts and encroachment, perceptions of other senior executives and conflicting duties. This section also discusses other approaches to gain more influence when practitioners may lack formal power such as boundary spanning, informal coalitions and social influence strategies. The chapter concludes with a discussion of coorientation and its potential influence on coalition formation.

EXCELLENCE THEORY

In their 15-year study on excellence in public relations, Grunig et al. (2002) found that public relations is best practiced when the function serves a managerial role in an organization, which includes membership or access to the dominant coalition, often referred to as the C-suite, which is comprised of the most senior officials in any organization such as the chief executive officer, chief operating officer and chief financial officer. Some of the specific responsibilities that have been used to define the managerial role of public relations include counseling management, making communication policy decisions, evaluating program results, and planning public relations programs (Toth, Serini, Wright, & Emig, 1998).

A basic assumption of excellence theory is that organizations are interdependent with their publics or stakeholders (Bivins, 1992; Grunig et al., 2002). According to

excellence theory, part of the managerial role involves conducting research called environmental scanning and then designing communication programs based on a two-way symmetric model of public relations, which involves balancing the interests of the organization and its publics (Grunig et al., 2002). This model encourages public relations managers to manage conflict and build “stable, open, and trusting relationships” with strategic stakeholders (Grunig et al., 2002, p. 11), rather than enduring the costs of conflict such as regulation, legislation and litigation. A key distinction between the managerial and communication technician roles in public relations is that the technician performs activities in support of goals and objectives determined by others, but the public relations manager participates in management policy decision-making including setting goals and objectives (Dozier & Broom, 1995). Scholars suggested that public relations’ managerial role is dependent on industry environmental conditions; in particular, Moss et al. (2000) found public relations was more valued in organizations operating in rapidly changing, extremely competitive industries, and particularly industries that are highly regulated by the government. These industries could be described as turbulent or crisis-prone; industries that are highly interdependent with their environment for survival (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978). Based on this theory, it is appropriate that researchers interested in studying public relations’ power and influence at the senior executive-level include both turbulent and stable environments in their studies to determine the impact of industry environmental conditions.

Multiple Executive-Level Coalitions

While most public relations research has focused on access to a single dominant coalition (Grunig et al., 2002; Moss et al. 2000; Bowen, 2008), Berger (2005) recently introduced the possibility of multiple executive-level coalitions, including a formal

dominant coalition that reviews and approves annual budgets and plans, but also other formal coalitions such as crisis and safety committees and public affairs management teams. In addition to these formal committees, Berger (2005) suggested that strategic business decisions are also made during informal or unannounced meetings occurring in out-of-the-way places such as airplanes, closed video conferencing and golf courses (p. 11). The possibility of multiple formal and informal executive-level coalitions suggests that researchers interested in public relations' power and influence at the senior executive-level should examine the role of informal coalitions in decision making.

Murnighan and Brass (1991) defined coalitions as “any subset of a group that pools its resources or unites as a single voice to determine a decision for the entire group” (p. 285). In their research, Eisenhardt and Bourgeois (1988) found that coalitions did not form based around agreement on issues, but rather on the basis of demographic factors such as “age, office location, similarity of titles, and prior experience together” (p. 756). Other scholars suggested that people create coalitions when “they do not have the power to change the organizational independently or want to avoid the political consequences associated with unilateral action” (Murnighan & Brass, 1991, p. 289). Murnighan and Brass (1991) also suggested that the inner circle, the most influential executives, likely participate in the most important coalitions in the organization.

Part of the difficulty in studying coalitions is the secrecy in which meetings are conducted. Eisenhardt and Bourgeois (1988) contrasted the politics of covert, behind the scenes coalition formation with “open and forthright discussion...in settings open to all decision makers” (p. 738). In one specific example involving a hiring decision committee, Murnighan and Brass (1991) described how members privately discussed the job candidates with other members in informal meetings prior to taking the vote. The majority of these meetings included the head engineer who had informal veto power, but

the engineer most likely to oppose their decision was excluded from these meetings, so his final vote was contrary to the majority (Murnighan & Brass, 1991). For this reason, Murnighan and Brass (1991) suggested that those with veto power must be included in winning coalitions and that they are likely to be among the first persons contacted for participation.

Eisenhardt and Bourgeois (1988) found less politics and coalition formation among decentralized decision teams where the CEO was characterized as consensus style, but more coalitions when power was centralized in a powerful chief executive, which suggests that organizational reporting structures and management style may have a role in coalition building. Because most research in public relations has focused on access to a single dominant coalition, additional research is needed to determine which executive-level formal public relations executives are most likely to participate in or be excluded from membership, as well as the role of informal coalitions. It is also appropriate to examine how organizational reporting structures and management style are connected to informal coalitions.

ORGANIZATIONAL POWER

When examining public relations' power and influence at the senior executive-level, organizational structure and reporting relationships are crucial factors to examine to determine how they may enhance or hinder the ability of practitioners to be influential. While scholars have identified the ideal placement of the public relations function in the hierarchy, referred to as excellence in public relations (Grunig et al., 2002), organizational factors can serve as obstructions to this aspiration. Grunig et al. (2002) listed several structural characteristics of excellent public relations programs in organizations including being a separate function from marketing, having a direct

reporting relationship to senior management, and serving as a member of the dominant coalition or at least indirect access to them. Contrary to this ideal, the reality is that organizational reporting relationships can limit the role of public relations, which may require participation in informal coalitions to influence organizational decisions, particularly organizational structures that place public relations under the leadership of marketing.

In organizations where public relations' reporting relationship was not a direct one, Bowen (2009) found the most common route to membership in the dominant coalition is a crisis situation, but membership was only temporary and ended following the crisis. Other routes to membership included providing counsel regarding ethical dilemmas, gaining credibility over time after a record of successes, counseling management on issues high in media attention, and possessing leadership abilities (Bowen, 2009). However, many of these routes required many years of service to achieve and access was often short-term. While these routes offer some insight into how public relations can gain more power and influence, there may be additional paths that can be identified.

Social Bases of Power

When executives do not have formal power or authority, social influence can be a form of power, which often involves the formation of informal coalitions. Social influence is "a change in the belief, attitude or behavior of a person ...which results from the action, or presence of another person" (Raven, 1992, p. 218). Social influence and power is tied to a motivation referred to by scholars as the goal of affiliation, the belief that if people are engaged in the right behaviors, others will approve of them (Cialdini & Goldstein, 2004). Consistent with the concept of social influence, French and Raven's

(1959) five bases of power have implications for public relations practitioners who seek more power and influence among the senior executive leaders. The sources of power include reward, coercive, legitimate, referent, and expert/informational power. Reward and coercive power are associated with the ability to administer rewards or punishments. Legitimate power is often associated with characteristics such as social structure, age or position. Tactics associated with legitimate power typically include direct orders and commands (Kahn, Wolfe, Quinn, Snoek, & Rosenthal 1964). Referent and expert power, which Kahn et al. (1964) classified as one type of power, are associated with respect, attraction and identification. While similar in its effect, referent power was described as a feeling of oneness or identification with another, and expert power was tied to knowledge or ability in specialized areas (French & Raven, 1959). Effective tactics associated with referent and expert power include providing new information and reasoning to persuade the individual to accept his point of view (Kahn et al., 1964). Among these five bases of power, referent and expert power appear to be the ones holding the most promise for public relations practitioners (Berger & Reber, 2005; Kahn et al., 1964). Referent power would likely develop over time as senior public relations practitioners develop working relationships with other senior executives. Expert power can be achieved through environmental scanning, a form of valued intelligence for organizational decision-making, as well as other public relations' competencies such as crisis communications and ghostwriting for executives.

In his power/interaction model of interpersonal influence, Raven (1992) outlined a process for using social power that begins with a motivation to influence, then involves an assessment of available power bases and preferences, next the use of self-presentation strategies referred to as "setting the stage," and then finally enacting the influence attempt. Once the power base is selected, the influencer has several tactics that are

available when setting the stage for influence such as providing background information, ingratiating oneself to the person being influenced, using self-promotion techniques such as displaying awards, and emphasizing commonality (Raven, 1992). When enacting the influence attempt, specific communication strategies have been identified for managers include reasoning, coalition building, invoking higher authority, and circumventing or going around the person or decision to achieve the result in an indirect manner (Redmond & Trager, 1998). Once the influence attempt is made, then the influencer must deal with the effects. Raven (1992) wrote the influencer's "success or failure will lead to a reassessment of the available bases of power" and choice of future strategies (p. 230). While scholars have identified the range of power strategies that are available, a key question is which of these strategies public relations practitioners can use most effectively to gain more access and influence among senior executives.

Structural vs. Coalitional Models of Organizational Power

Two competing theories provide insight into how public relations may increase its power and gain access to senior executive-level coalitions; strategic contingencies' theory of intraorganizational power suggests power is structurally based with attention to the primary services provided by a given department, while resource dependency theory is politically based and focused more on social influence strategies such as the formation of informal coalitions.

The strategic contingencies' theory of intraorganizational power is considered a structural or systemic theory of power as dependencies are created by the division of labor among organizational departments (Mumby, 2001; Astley & Zajac, 1991). The theory suggested that power is associated with a subunits' ability to cope with uncertainty, to provide services that are not substitutable by another subunit and that are

central or essential to the primary workflow of the organization (Hickson, Hinings, Lee, Schneck & Pennings, 1971). Some of the key aspects of the theory include that participants are performing tasks associated with collective goals of the organization and that power is not dependent on access to external resources (Astley & Zajac, 1991). This theory has implications for public relations, because Scott (1981) suggested that the greater the number of sources of uncertainty in the organization's environment, the larger the number of participants that will be included in the dominant coalition, improving public relations' odds of being included in executive decision making teams. This assumption provides further support that public relations would be more likely to be involved in formal executive-level coalitions in organizations characterized by more turbulent environmental conditions.

While the strategic contingencies' theory is focused on the structure of departments, resource dependency theory is a coalitional model of power focused on political activities. Resource dependency theory suggested that organizational decision making is a political process in which "groups and individuals with varying interests and preferences come together to engage in exchanges" (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978, p. 26). Resource dependency theory suggested that participants in the organization make contributions, which are considered resources (Astley & Zajac, 1991). To the extent that these resources are valued, other coalition members will become dependent on those contributing the resources, which can then generate influence (Astley & Zajac, 1991). Consistent with this perspective, Emerson (1962) suggested that power is not an attribute of an individual, but instead is based on social relations and "resides implicitly in the other's dependency" (p. 32), a perspective that is consistent with social influence theories. While a means of increasing power is by creating resource dependencies, the degree to which others counter this will result in less power (Astley & Zajac, 1991).

Some key distinctions between strategic contingencies' theory and resource dependency theory are that resource dependency stresses autonomy and avoiding dependence on others, while strategic contingencies' theory emphasizes centrality and interdependence (Astley & Zajac, 1991). It is unclear which of the two approaches is more successful at gaining influence in executive-level coalitions suggesting that it is appropriate to study both politics (e.g. social influence) and structure.

Boundary Spanning & Stakeholder Analysis

Potential sources of expert power and influence for public relations practitioners emerge from their roles of boundary spanning and stakeholder analysis. In their boundary spanning role, they are vital to an organization due to "their ability to recognize and deal with trends or changes in the environment" (Jemison, 1984, p. 131). Aldrich and Herker (1977) identified two types of functions for boundary spanners in public relations: information processing and external representation. Through the information processing role, public relations practitioners gather information through environmental scanning, a form of external research. They then filter that information by choosing to act on some information, store other information, or summarize and interpret the data in communication with senior management (Aldrich & Herker, 1977). This intelligence could be considered a valuable resource to senior management, a potential source of organizational power. The second function, external representation, involves providing information from the organization to key stakeholders to maintain the organization's image (Aldrich & Herker, 1977).

Leichty and Springston (1996) expanded on these boundary spanning roles in the context of public relations to include activities such as advocacy, representing the organization to external publics; gatekeeping, deciding what information to pass along

and to whom; and providing strategic counsel. Aldrich and Herker (1977) suggested that as gatekeepers, boundary spanners can become more powerful “if they make correct inferences and if the information is vital for organizational survival” (p. 227). In their role as boundary spanners, public relations practitioners provide an essential service by helping to reduce uncertainty (Hickson et al., 1971). Aldrich and Herker (1977) suggested that more stable environments should have less a need for boundary spanning than more turbulent environments, which supports studying public relations in both types of settings.

While it has received scarce attention in public relations theory, scholars in other fields have suggested boundary spanning roles can also be internal, which have been defined as “activities required to coordinate interdependent but differentiated individuals and subunits within and across organizational boundaries” (Miles & Perreault 1976, pg. 21). These boundary spanning activities can include linking and coordinating people, as well as filtering and transferring information across departments and up and down the hierarchy (Miles, 1976; Jemison, 1984).

Consistent with public relations’ external boundary spanning role is stakeholder analysis, a process that involves identifying potential stakeholders and their concerns, and determining which to give priority to when there are competing claims (Agle, Mitchell & Sonnenfeld, 1999; Mitchell, Agle & Wood, 1997). Public relations practitioners identify the concerns of key stakeholders through various forms of research such as monitoring the media, conducting surveys or focus groups, and serving on the boards of community organizations (Cutlip, Center & Broom, 2006). Next, Mitchell et al. (1997) suggested that managers evaluate stakeholders based on their possession of the attributes of power, legitimacy and urgency. Power has been defined as the “quality enabling one person to get another to do something” (Redmond & Trager, 1998, p. 148), and it can be based on

physical (coercive power), financial, or symbolic resources such as prestige (Mitchell et al., 1997). Legitimacy is defined as a “perception or assumption that the actions of an entity are desirable, proper, or appropriate” (Suchman, 1995). Legitimate stakeholders have been described as those that have a “contract, expressed or implied, between them and the firm,” and those who may experience harm or benefit as a “result of the firm’s actions or inactions” (Donaldson & Preston, 1995, p. 85). Urgency is the “degree to which stakeholder claims call for immediate attention” (Mitchell et al., 1997).

Stakeholders have also been delineated as primary based on formal, official or contractual relationships such as those with customers, employees and shareholders, versus secondary, which typically includes the media and consumer advocacy groups (Gibson, 2000; Smith et al., 2010). While publicly held organizations have fiduciary relationships with their stockholders, Goodpaster (1991) pointed out that other stakeholders such as customers, employees, suppliers and the community become salient based on economic and legal factors. In addition, others have suggested that all stakeholders have intrinsic value (Donaldson & Preston, 1995; Jones & Wicks, 1999), consistent with Kant’s principle that we should treat “others never merely as means but always at the same time as ends in themselves” (Gregor, 1997, p. 41). Gibson (2000) wrote that stakeholder theory presents “an implicit or explicit moral claim to the effect that the corporation has duties to others, even in the absence of potential benefits” (p. 248). This view is supported by the American Law Institute report, *Principles of Corporate Governance* (1992), which states that corporate decisions are often made on the basis of ethical considerations and “such behavior is not only appropriate, but desirable” (p. 80).

Once stakeholder concerns have been identified, senior executives would then compare these claims and obligations (Bivins, 1992) and then make a choice, which

Goodpaster (1991) referred to as stakeholder synthesis, a movement from stakeholder identification to a practical response or resolution. Ongoing stakeholder analysis is necessary because stakeholders can vary in saliency by time and issues (Mitchell et al., 1997). This type of analysis is an essential service that public relations managers can fulfill in an organization that could contribute to their power and influence at the senior executive-level.

Complicating the boundary spanning and stakeholder analysis roles of public relations practitioners is balancing their clients' interests with the public interest (Pearson, 1989). Bivins (2004) applied Ross' (1930) *prima facie* duties to the practice of public relations and suggested that practitioners have duties of fidelity, justice and non-injury to their clients, the profession, issue-defined publics and receivers of communication. These include honoring contracts (clients), upholding standards (profession), adhering to principles of justice and non-injury (public), and telling the truth (receivers) (Bivins, 2004; Ross, 1930). Baker and Martinson (2001) developed the TARES Test that practitioners can use to evaluate their decisions. Using this model, practitioners would evaluate their decisions based on the truthfulness of the message, authenticity of the persuader, respect for the one being persuaded, equity of the appeal and social responsibility. Based on these principles, the authors wrote that "public relations practitioners act unethically if they utilize methods intended to manipulate, exploit, or both" rather than respect their audiences (Baker & Martinson, 2001, p. 158). Boundary spanning and stakeholder analysis may be examples of essential services that senior public relations executives can provide that would help them gain power and influence among executive-level coalitions. In addition, stakeholder analysis can include some ethical deliberations and counsel. The key question to answer is whether or not these services are recognized and valued by other senior executive leaders.

Domain Similarity & Encroachment

As public relations scholars and practitioners have advocated for more influence at the senior executive-level, a common organizational barrier that has been identified by public relations scholars is encroachment by other departments. Encroachment has been defined as assigning someone from outside of public relations to manage the function, which also implies that public relations has no influence on communication policy decisions in an organization (Dozier, 1988). This has serious implications for organizations; as Broom and Dozier (1986) pointed out, when PR is involved in decision making, “information about relations with priority publics get factored into organization decisions, policies, and actions,” a reference to stakeholder analysis (p. 42). What this implies is that if a public relations manager is not in the executive board room when communication policy decisions are being made, key stakeholder perspectives may not be considered.

While the strategic contingencies’ theory of intraorganizational power and resource dependency described how organizational subunits can distinguish themselves to gain more power and influence, the concept of domain similarity has been applied to describe why some departments can easily assume roles that traditionally have been in other domains. Domain similarity is defined as “the degree to which two different individuals or departments share the same goals, skills, or tasks” (Ruekert & Walker, 1987, p. 6). Lauzen (1993) pointed out that when organizations perceive domain similarity among subunits, one function is considered to be substitutable for the other, which is exactly opposite to the means outlined for achieving power described by the strategic contingencies’ theory of intraorganizational power. She suggested that public relations “practitioners frequently perceive themselves and are perceived by others as fulfilling highly substitutable, technical roles” and these perceptions decrease the power

of public relations” (Lauzen, 1991, p. 247). Some of the specific responsibilities that have been attributed to technical roles in public relations include writing, editing and producing messages; making media contacts; and implementing event planning and logistical activities (Toth et al, 1998).

One domain that has been considered similar to public relations is marketing; however, some key distinctions have been identified. In a survey involving members of the Public Relations Society of America and the American Marketing Association, Spicer (1991) found that marketing practitioners were less likely to engage in writing activities and media relations when compared to public relations practitioners. While those skills are considered more tactical in nature, Berger and Reber (2005) found that public relations practitioners said they were most influential in their crisis communication roles, which involves reducing uncertainty for an organization, a more strategic function. In addition, Grunig (2006) wrote that CEOs value hearing external voices in the strategic management process, which are “amplified by public relations professionals who scan the publics in the organization’s environment” (p. 162), which is a reference to boundary spanning. Unlike marketing, the voices public relations managers represent include both primary and secondary stakeholders beyond customers such as employees, communities, the media and government agencies (Smith et al., 2010).

For decades, public relations scholars and practitioners have been concerned about the potential for encroachment by similar communication disciplines such as marketing in corporations and social marketing or development in nonprofit organizations. Some of the areas where encroachment of responsibilities may occur include job descriptions that list both the need for marketing and public relations skills (Spicer, 1991), calls for the expansion of marketing into other domains with terms such as megamarketing, relationship marketing or social marketing (Broom, Lauzen, &

Tucker, 1991; Kotler & Levy, 1969; Kotler, 1986; Andreasen, 1994). Other issues involve questions as to which function is responsible for product publicity (Broom et al., 1991), and most recently the issue of which function should manage social media communication (Solis & Breakenridge, 2009).

The expansion of marketing into traditional public relations' job responsibilities is referred to as functional encroachment, defined as "one department intruding on the activities traditionally in the domain of the other" (Lauzen, 1991, p. 245; Lee et al, 1999). An even more threatening form is structural encroachment, which is defined as assigning someone from outside of public relations to manage the function, which also implies that public relations has no influence in communication policy decisions in an organization (Dozier, 1988). This form of encroachment has serious implications for organizations that could face costly crises if key stakeholder concerns are not considered prior to making decisions, a mistake Kelly (1993) referred to as "environmental blinders" (p. 353). In contrast, organizational excellence has been found to be positively correlated with public relations' influence in top-management decision making in times of crises and negatively related to encroachment by other departments such as legal (Lee et al., 1999).

As public relations professionals fight for more power and access to senior management coalitions, there have been signs of encroachment by marketing and legal. Kotler (1986) recommended that marketing professionals add public relations and power to the traditional 4Ps (product, price, place, and promotion), what he called megamarketing, in order to enter new markets. In that same article, Kotler (1986) warned that marketers may face some internal resistance, because megamarketing "impinges on the responsibilities of some nonmarketing executives" (p. 123-124). When examining the relationship between public relations and legal, Fitzpatrick and Rubin (1995) found through a content analysis of news reports that traditional legal strategies were used in

two-thirds of the crisis situations. They described traditional legal strategies as saying nothing or as little as possible and releasing it as quietly as possible in contrast to traditional public relations strategies, which were described as stating company policies, investigating allegations, being candid and implementing corrective actions (Fitzpatrick & Rubin, 1995). Based on Coombs' (1995) typology of crisis communication strategies, the legal strategies would be comparable to silence as a response and the public relations strategies are consistent with mortification, an "attempt to win forgiveness of the publics" through forms of compensation, apologies and taking action to prevent a recurrence (Coombs, 1995, p. 452-453).

These findings suggest that the role of public relations' power and influence is dependent on both the organizational structure and relationships with other senior executives. For this reason, it is appropriate to study both organizations where public relations has a direct reporting relationship to the CEO, and organizations where public relations has an indirect reporting relationship, specifically a structure where they report to marketing, to determine how this may impact their participation in senior executive-level formal and informal coalitions. In addition, it is appropriate to examine how similar domains such as marketing, human resources and investor relations are structured in the organization.

Coorientation Theory

Another theory providing insight into organizational power and influence is the coorientation model of communication, which addresses organizational role perceptions. The coorientation model of communication has been applied to the study of interpersonal relationships in a variety of contexts including public relations practitioners' relationships with legal (Reber et al., 2001), senior management's relationship with employees

(Cameron & McCollum, 1993), and public relations practitioners' relationships with journalists (Shin & Cameron, 2005). Newcomb's (1953) model is composed of one person (A) who transmits information to another person (B) about something (X). The assumption of this theory is that A and B are interdependent and constitute a system (Newcomb, 1953). When someone communicates with others, the symbolic interactionism perspective suggests that they engage in role-taking, "looking at or anticipating another's behavior by viewing it in the context of a role," and "identifying the feelings or motives behind the behavior" (Biddle & Thomas, 1966, p. 151). This perception then impacts how an individual responds to others, called the interactive effect (Biddle & Thomas, 1966). Turner (1956) stressed that roles do not refer to positions, but to expected or appropriate behavior, so that a person does not occupy a role, but instead enacts a role. Chaffee and McLeod (1968) suggested that we have a pair of cognitions in interpersonal relations - what we personally think and some estimate of what the other person thinks, which are connected to role-taking. Congruency refers to a situation when we perceive that the other person's opinions resemble our own, and accuracy refers to situations when one person's perceptions of the other's evaluations are true (Chaffee & McLeod, 1968). However, Scheff (1967) has identified four possibilities that can occur: monolithic consensus, when people agree and understand they agree; pluralistic ignorance, when they actually agree, but perceive that they disagree; dissensus, when they disagree and accurately understand that they disagree; and false consensus, when they actually do not agree, but perceive that they are in agreement. Reber et al. (2001) found that lawyers provided strong evidence of coorientation accuracy; they were good at predicting public relations practitioners' responses to crisis communication, but the reverse was not true. Public relations practitioners were not as effective at predicting lawyers' responses.

One method of measuring coorientation has been to identify the number of shared attributes based on the assumption that if two people “share neither the same comparison object nor the attributes, communication cannot succeed...they are... on different wavelengths” (McLeod & Chaffee, 1973, p. 486). A key assumption associated with coorientation is that we prefer to communicate more frequently with those to whom we are attracted (Newcomb, 1953). Some of the source characteristics that can contribute to social influence include perceived credibility, competence, trustworthiness, and demographic and attitudinal similarity (Miller & Levine, 1996). Coorientation may play a role in coalition formation, as scholars have suggested that people choose allies among “those with whom they interact frequently and with whom they feel comfortable” (Eisenhardt & Bourgeois, 1988, p. 758).

Based on coorientation theory, researchers should examine how public relations executives’ perceptions of their role compare to other senior executives’ perceptions examining issues such as when public relations should be included in strategic decision making and when it should not, as well as the appropriate place for public relations in the organizational reporting chart.

This chapter discussed the model role of public relations in an organization, as well as organizational factors that impact public relations’ degree of influence such as industry context, organizational hierarchy, encroachment and perceptions of other senior executives. The literature review also examined how coalitions are formed and power strategies that senior executives can use to gain more influence. This section also included an examination of public relations’ role in boundary spanning and stakeholder analysis, which may contribute to organizational power and influence. The chapter concluded with a discussion of role perceptions and coorientation, which may influence

coalition formation at the senior executive-level. The theories that were reviewed were all connected to the research questions that are the focus of this study, and the previous research that was discussed served as guide for the research design.

CHAPTER 3: METHODS

Based on nature of the questions, which focus on the meaning people place on events, processes and structure (Miles & Huberman, 1994) in the context of senior management, qualitative research is appropriate. When the goal of researchers is to “develop a better understanding of why individuals act as they do” (Davis, 1997, p. 195), qualitative research methods such as in-depth interviews are considered a suitable choice. Elite interviews typically refer to interviews with decision makers (Drumwright & Murphy, 2004) and have been a common research method for studies on public relations and the dominant coalition (Bowen, 2009; Moss et al. 2000; Reber et al., 2001). As further support, Drumwright (1996) wrote that “a researcher may infer meaning from behavior, but when he or she wants to know what the actor thinks is happening, elite interviewing often provides a more direct and useful tool” (p. 72) than other research methods. Personal interviews are also considered appropriate when the subject matter is highly confidential, when group pressure or the presence of others is likely to alter or discourage honesty, and when there is a need to acquire a detailed, step-by-step understanding of complicated behaviors or decision-making patterns (Davis, 1997).

Research Design

To answer these research questions, executive-level coalitions were studied in four companies. The external environments of the corporations that were examined included both turbulent conditions, characterized by rapid change, tight regulation, competition, and frequent crises, and stable environmental conditions because previous research suggests that public relations’ power and influence will vary by context, specifically public relations is expected to play a more central role in turbulent

environments (Moss et al., 2000). The telecommunications company and the energy company were initially selected to represent the more turbulent environment, due to the fact they are regulated by the government, with employees specifically assigned to lobbying activities; and a franchising company and financial services company were each selected to represent the stable environment.

To confirm the environmental classification, several factors were considered including the type of industry, responses of the informants about the characteristics of their industries, and finally a content analysis was conducted of a sample of news stories about the four companies obtained from weekly electronic news alerts. A total of 663 stories were coded based on the nature of the story with categories associated with more turbulent activities such as crises, competition, litigation, and unions, as well as more positive news coverage related to honors/awards, company announcements, and philanthropy/community relations. A summary comparing the news coverage across all four companies for one month is provided (Appendix A), which depicts that Company A received no turbulent news coverage that month, Company B 40% of the news coverage was turbulent in nature, Company C 33% of the coverage was turbulent, and Company D 16% of the coverage was turbulent. The content analysis confirmed the correct classification of a financial services company and a franchising company to represent the more stable industries, and a telecommunications company and an energy company as representing turbulent industries due to the number of stories related to competition, litigation, government regulation, and crises.

The companies selected for this study serve customers either in multiple U.S. states or globally, and have been featured in prominent publications such as *Fortune* and *Harvard Business Review*. As an indication of their standing in the industry, three of the four companies have appeared among *Fortune's* list of the top 50, 150 or 500 companies.

The second criterion considered when selecting companies were whether or not the senior public relations officer has a direct reporting relationship to the president or CEO. If a public relations officer does not have a direct reporting relationship, he or she will be more likely to have to participate in informal coalitions to influence senior-executive-level decisions, due to limited formal power. The companies in the sample were classified based on whether or not the most senior public relations officer reported to the president or CEO in the organizational chart or in actual practice. Two of the companies were structured in this manner, and at the other two companies, public relations reported to a marketing officer. The classifications were based both on copies of actual organizational reporting charts and statements made by the informants in the companies. For these reasons, the four companies represented the following categories: direct reporting relationship in a stable environment – financial services, direct reporting relationship in a turbulent, crisis-prone environment – energy, indirect reporting relationship in a stable environment – franchising, and indirect reporting relationship in a turbulent, crisis-prone environment – telecommunications. While it was not part of the sampling criteria, two of the companies were privately held and two of the companies were publicly traded. To protect the identity of the four companies, they will be identified by the labels, Company A, B, C, and D. A total of nine informants were consulted at Company A, 10 informants from Company B, five from Company C, and six from Company D, which reflects a total sample of 30 senior executives.

Table 1: Classification of Companies

Turbulent vs. Stable	Direct vs. Indirect	
	Company B: Energy	Company C: Telecommunications

	Company D: Financial Services	Company A: Franchising
<p>Description of Company A – 9 informants</p> <p>Privately owned (equity firm) global franchising company with 7 brands and franchisees in the U.S., Canada and Europe. Public relations reports to marketing director (indirect reporting relationship). Classified as a stable industry with indirect reporting relationship.</p> <p>Description of Company B – 10 informants</p> <p>Publicly traded energy company serving 12 states. Public relations reports to directly to CEO and division presidents. Classified as highly regulated, crisis prone industry and direct reporting relationship.</p> <p>Description of Company C – 5 Informants</p> <p>Publicly traded global telecommunications company. Public relations reports to global marketing officer. Classified as highly regulated, crisis prone industry with an indirect reporting relationship.</p> <p>Description of Company D – 6 informants</p> <p>Privately held national financial services company. Public relations reports directly to CEO and division presidents. Classified as stable industry with a direct reporting relationship.</p>		

Within each company, the participants were asked to discuss two issues of a strategic nature the company had recently faced, which were not merely communication issues. Pearce and DeNisi (1983) defined strategic decisions as those “designed to achieve the major objectives of the firm” and which involve “long term, future oriented, complex issues” (p.121). The public relations officer in each organization selected the two issues in collaboration with the researcher. The first type of issues involves ones in which the public relations officer was included in an appropriate manner, meaning early

and throughout the decision making process, in executive-level coalitions. The second type of issues they were asked to describe were ones in which public relations was not included at all or in an appropriate manner, such as being brought in at the implementation or tactical stage after the strategic decisions had already been made. Then the other senior executives were asked about their participation in addressing the same issues. The scope of the study covered eight strategic issues faced by four companies; five of those issues the public relations informants considered to fit the category of appropriate inclusion and the other three issues fit the second category of when public relations was either excluded or brought in at later stage in the decision making. The first issue was the transition from a print to an electronic publication, the second and third issues involved public relations' response to two crises, the fourth issue was a merger/acquisition, and the fifth issue dealt with proposed fee increases being considered in two different business units.

Table 2: Issues Studied (PR included) & Informants

Issue #	# of Informants	Decision Studied	Types of Informants
1	7	Transition from a Print to an Electronic Publication	Marketing Manager, Director of Marketing, VP- Marketing, Project manager-Marketing, Communications Manager (PR), Public Relations Specialist, Brand President
2 & 3	6 (3 per crisis)	Public Relations' Response to Two Crises	Director of Public Affairs (division-level), VP of Governmental Affairs & Public Affairs (corporate-level), Director – Government & Public Affairs (corporate level),

			President (division-level), VP Operations (division-level), Public Affairs Manager
4	4	Merger/Acquisition	Senior VP of Corporate Communications (national media), Senior VP – Investor Relations, Senior VP – Corporate Communications (regional media & internal communication), Senior VP – Public Affairs & Chief Sustainability Officer
5	5	Fee Increases Across Business Units	VP- External Communications, Executive Director – Corporate Communications, Director of Communications, VP Market Research/Competitive Intelligence (Marketing), Assistant VP Enterprise Underwriting & Pricing (finance)

While insights can be gleaned from examples of times when public relations is included in strategic decision making, perhaps even more enlightening is examining situations where public relations was either not included or in an optimal way. The senior executives from three of the companies expressed difficulty in identifying strategic issues when public relations would not be included due to their companies' use of integrated decision teams; however, three strategic issues were eventually identified. The sixth strategic issue discussed was an appearance on a national television show; the seventh was the launch of a new employee wellness program; and the eighth was a new business

partnership. While all six informants at Company D were asked about their knowledge of the eighth issue, only two were familiar with this business agreement, also complicating the identification of knowledgeable informants, the actual decision makers no longer work there.

Table 3: Issues Studied (PR not optimally included) & Informants

Issue #	# of Informants	Decision Studied	Types of Informants
6	9	Appearance on a National TV Show	Marketing Manager, Director of Marketing, VP- Marketing, Project manager-Marketing, Communications Manager (PR), Public Relations Specialist, Brand President, PR agency - Vice President and Principal; VP- Marketing & Operations, Franchise Development (Sales)
7	3	Employee Wellness Program	President (division-level), Director of Public Affairs (division-level), VP of HR (division-level)
8	2	New Business Partnership	VP- External Communications, Executive Director – Stakeholder Engagement/Mobilization

Sampling

Because the public relations officers served as the main liaison in the companies for the study, they were recruited first for participation. Consistent with snowball

sampling (Wimmer & Dominick, 2006), members of the Southwest District of the Public Relations Society of America were contacted for referrals of potential members who fit the criteria of serving as the most senior public relations officer in their organization. Once senior public relations officers agreed to participate in the study, they were asked for assistance in scheduling interviews with other members of the senior executive team at their companies. To insure that the most influential senior executives were interviewed, they were selected based on being named by multiple senior executives as being key participants in senior executive coalitions that addressed the specific issues at each company that were the focus of the study.

The senior executive informants at each company were selected using purposive sampling, which is defined as including “subjects or elements selected for specific characteristics or qualities” and eliminating “those who fail to meet these criteria” (Wimmer & Dominick, 2006, p. 91-92). The participants were selected due to their specialized knowledge about the issue being researched due to their membership in relevant executive decision making coalitions. For the purpose of this study, the sample size is 30 participants representing multiple senior executive roles in four corporations and who worked at either the company headquarters or in their offices, which were located in three U.S. states.

Fifteen of the interviews were conducted in person, and the remaining 15 were conducted by phone. Nineteen (63%) of the senior managers were male and 11 were female (37%). The participants represented a variety of senior executive positions including Division or Brand Presidents, VP of Marketing, VP of Operations, SVP of Investor Relations, VP of Market Research and Competitive Intelligence (marketing), Assistant VP of Finance, and VP of Human Resources. Public relations informants ranged from a brand or division manager level to director level up to VP and SVP levels.

Table 4: Description of Sample

Job Titles of Participants	# of Participants in Category
Division or Brand President	3
SVP or VP level (outside PR) – investor relations, operations, human resources, finance	4
VP of Marketing or Sales	4
VP - PR agency	1
SVP or VP Corporate Communications/ Public Affairs/ Government Relations	5
Marketing Director or Manager	3
Public Affairs/Corporate Communications Director	6
Public Relations/ Public Affairs Manager	4

Those selected for the sample were asked to participate in in-depth interviews, which averaged 43 minutes. During the interviews, they were asked to discuss decision-making for two strategic issues the company had recently addressed. After the participants signed consent forms, the interviews were audio-recorded to assist with data analysis. Transcripts were prepared and produced 270 pages of typed, single-spaced text, representing almost 22 hours of interviews.

In an effort to provide anonymity and confidentiality both inside and outside the organization, the participants' names were not on the recordings and the recordings are identified by numbers that were assigned to the participants. The findings are being reported as general themes that are common to many of the participants and in such a way that none of the informants or their organizations can be identified.

In addition to the interviews, the study included examination of documents such as organizational reporting charts that illustrate reporting relationships, mission

statements, online executive bios, employee newsletters, and a DVD of an employee meeting. In addition, the researcher examined news articles related to some of the strategic issues discussed by the participants.

Interview Protocol

Interview protocols were designed for the public relations officers and other senior executives (Appendix B & C). The protocol for the public relations officer only varied significantly from the other protocol in the section related to asking them to identify the original strategic issues and the section related to their perceptions of public relations. For example, in the role of public relations section, the public relations officer was asked how other senior executives might view the role of public relations, and the other senior executives were asked how their public relations officer might describe the ideal role of public relations. Public relations officers were also asked if there was anything they might like to change in their organizations if they believed their current role was not ideal, or if they did consider their role to be ideal, what factors they attributed to enabling them to play that role. Other senior executives were asked for examples of times when public relations should be included in problem solving and times when it should not. All the informants were asked to discuss the role of public relations in their specific companies, the types of executive-level coalitions that are present in their companies, the role of various senior executives in addressing two strategic issues, and what they believe is the actual versus the ideal role of public relations in their companies. The protocol was designed so that the early questions were general to allow the participants to define the situation, followed by more specific questions and prompts regarding the role of senior executives in past decision-making coalitions.

Data Analysis

The data was analyzed using the methods described by Miles and Huberman (1994) for qualitative analysis, which involves breaking the data analysis process into three steps: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. They write that data reduction “is a form of analysis that sharpens, sorts, focuses, discards, and organizes data in such a way that final conclusions can be drawn and verified” (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 11). This can be accomplished through selection, summary or paraphrase, or by identifying patterns. At this stage, Eisenhardt and Bourgeois (1988) developed decision stories, which summarized the various accounts of each executive that included details about when the decision began, when it was made, and how it was made. In a similar fashion, summaries of the accounts of the two strategic decisions at each company were created. Once the coding process is achieved, the next step is identifying pattern codes, which are often qualified, meaning that “conditions under which it holds are specified” (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 71). To identify patterns, pair-wise comparisons were made between the four companies to identify similarities and differences (Eisenhardt & Bourgeois, 1988). The second step identified by Miles and Huberman (1994) is data display, “a visual format that presents information systematically, so the user can draw valid conclusions” (p.91). Some of the display options include matrices with rows and columns, or networks that link elements such as cognitive maps or graphical charts. The purpose of this step is to simplify the data and aid in analysis. The final step in data analysis is drawing conclusions. Miles and Huberman (1994) listed multiple tactics for generating meaning, which include noting patterns and themes, clustering, making metaphors, counting the frequency, making contrasts and comparisons, and noting relationships among variables.

Limitations

The limitations of qualitative research are well-known, and this study is designed to mitigate these issues. Some of the potential weaknesses of in-depth interviews include the failure of the informants to provide accurate and truthful information, the tendency to ask for information to confirm the researcher's assumptions, or the possibility of the respondent giving "canned" or self-serving answers to the questions (Jensen & Jankowski, 1991, p. 102). The interview protocol was designed to minimize these weaknesses by using questions that are broad and open-ended to enable the respondents to define the situation and by following up with guided introspection (Wallendorf & Brucks, 1993), which encourages participants to think out loud. Other potential weaknesses include impression management and social desirability bias (Kumar, Stern & Anderson, 1993). Some of these weaknesses can be addressed by assuring the participants of confidentiality and anonymity. To encourage open and honest responses, informants were assured that the findings would be reported as general themes and in such a way that none of the informants or their organizations can be identified.

Another potential bias is that the public relations informants selected the original strategic issues for discussion; however, other senior executives were given the opportunity to discuss other issues if they were not active participants in the original issues and two of the issues that will be discussed were actually selected by senior executives outside of public relations (e.g. employee wellness, crisis). A limitation related to the selection of strategic issues is that while informants identified and described five strategic issues related to issues where public relations played a central role, they only identified and described three strategic issues where public relations either was not included or had a less strategic role. The informants attributed their difficulty in identifying issues where public relations did not play a central role to the use of

integrated decision teams in their companies, which often meant public relations was included in key meetings.

Researchers can check the validity and reliability of their findings in several ways including triangulation, using more than one method of data collection. This study used interviews, review of documents such as organizational charts and executive bios, and external and internal communication (e.g. news coverage and employee newsletters). In addition, the strategic decisions were discussed by multiple informants allowing a means for verifying the accuracy of the accounts.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

This chapter discusses findings related to the three research questions. The first section addresses the issue regarding how public relations executives are successfully gaining power and influence at the senior executive-level. The second section identifies the factors that enhance or hinder public relations' power and influence among senior executive leaders. The third section examines social influence strategies and tactics used by senior executives to increase their influence.

While public relations practitioners have been seeking a seat at the table of the dominant coalitions for decades, Scott (1981) pointed out that access is an "empty victory" if the public relations executive has no influence among other senior executives sitting at that table (p. 270). With that perspective, this study is focused on examining how public relations can be influential at the highest levels of the company, meaning that other senior executives respect and listen to public relations counsel, and when the advice is sound, follow that advice. To that end, the research was focused on understanding what role public relations is currently serving at the senior executive-level, how the function is perceived by other senior executives, and what essential services senior public relations executives are performing that can lead to influence and power among the executive leadership team.

PUBLIC RELATIONS' ESSENTIAL SERVICES

Scholars have suggested that organizational power and influence are associated with a department's ability to provide services that are not easily substitutable by another department and that are essential to the primary workflow of the organization (Hickson et al., 1971). For that reason, it is appropriate to identify what, if any, services public relations is providing that are specialized, valued and distinct from similar domains such

as marketing or human resources. Four essential services performed by senior public relations executives emerged among the four U.S. companies that participated in this study including internal boundary spanning, the management of social media, external boundary spanning and advocacy, and stakeholder analysis. While the function was referred to by different titles, such as corporate communications (Companies C and D), public affairs (Company B and C) and public relations (Company A), the primary duties they performed were comparable across the four companies.²

Connecting the Dots: Internal Boundary Spanning

One of the most significant findings that emerged from the data is public relations' internal boundary spanning role, which is a form of informational power. Internal boundary spanning involves gathering intelligence across the company's various business units and then "connecting the dots" to identify strategic decisions that may be inconsistent or not in the company's best interest. Public relations executives then counsel other senior executives regarding stakeholders' concerns and public reaction, which is consistent with public relations' reputation management role. By pointing out troubling issues before decisions are finalized, public relations executives can help their companies avoid costly mistakes and the negative publicity that often follows. In the past, scholars have focused exclusively on public relations' external boundary spanning duties such as environmental scanning, external representation and advocacy (Aldrich & Herker, 1977; Leichty & Springston, 1996); however, it is clear that public relations executives can play an essential role internally as well. As an indication of its centrality

² The public relations function was actually split into two departments at Company C: corporate communications and government/public affairs and reported to two different members of the executive leadership team, the global marketing officer and the external and legislative affairs officer.

to public relations, internal boundary spanning was described by informants at three of the companies, but it was broader in scope at Companies B and D.

Expanded Internal Boundary Spanning Role. Boundary spanning activities in Companies B (energy) and D (financial services) involved linking and coordinating people, as well as transferring information across departments and up and down the hierarchy (Miles, 1976; Jemison, 1984). Key to this role at Companies B and D is public relations' participation in integrated decision teams that allows them to gather intelligence across the company. At both companies, public relations executives were highly integrated in formal leadership teams at the division level, as well as executive-level committees such as a strategic spending team and a brand and reputation committee. As one corporate communications executive said, "Many corporate communications professionals seek to get a 'seat at the table,' but we have a seat at every single leadership table in the company." Consistent with this broader role for public relations, a public affairs manager discussed how her personal view of public relations has evolved from focusing on a seat at the dominant coalition to its integration throughout the company. She said:

I probably would have answered it differently four years ago. I probably would have said somewhere at the top...but there needs to be employees that are out there... at different locations or serving a territory ... It would be very difficult for that (one) person to understand the different nuances in the community, understand employees, have those relationships ... and have that trust that's there, and so I do feel like there needs to be some people that do interact in a public relations level out with the employees and not just in the executive office.

These statements, along with the larger number and prominence of the committees that public relations executives serve on in companies where the expanded

boundary spanning activities occurred, indicate that for excellence in internal boundary spanning to occur, public relations practitioners need to have a seat at the decision tables at three levels in the company: the dominant coalition, the leadership team at the division level, as well as formal executive-level committees.

The second critical factor found in these two companies is that the public relations team then shares the information they have gathered in these various leadership roles in their departmental meetings, which enables them to “connect the dots” and examine strategic decisions being made across the company. Specifically at Company D (financial services), the corporate communications staff serves on the leadership team for each of the business units and then shares information with the rest of the corporate communications team. As one corporate communications executive said:

So at our company, we have a lot of different businesses that operate under one roof. So sometimes some of the value that I provide ... is I can tell them (other senior leaders) what's going on across the hallway ... simply because they may not have heard of it yet or may not be in those same meetings. So I can give them a view across the company.

Similar to company D, the public affairs executives at Company B (energy) meet monthly when the public affairs managers update their coworkers regarding activities related to their committee service, as well as from the territories they serve. As a public affairs manager said:

I report back regularly on our activities and what we're doing and anyone's welcome to give feedback or provide ideas if they have any... Our group is not shy about speaking up, “Well, I have a concern with this, or what are we doing to address such and such.”

A notable characteristic of these public affairs or corporate communications staff meetings at two of these companies is their open nature, which allows for further sharing of insights. As a public affairs executive at Company B said:

Ours is totally open and as a result, we found people value what we do, because they are a part of it. They understand it; they're brought in as consultants. We're constantly having them come in and teach us what they do and then they learn what we do.

At Company D, a marketing executive reported a similar practice:

I have one of my people on my staff sitting in their extended staff meetings every month to make sure that we're clued into what they're doing and they can be clued into what we're doing.

These types of inclusive decision teams allow for intelligence to be gathered and shared across company divisions, enabling the company to make more informed decisions. At company D, the respondents described in-depth a specific time when corporate communications served as this internal boundary spanner and prevented the company from making a mistake. Corporate communications staff actually had to campaign behind the scenes rather than through a formal committee process. As one corporate communications executive explained:

At the exact same time, right down the hall, our partners on the insurance side were struggling with a decision ... What it took was executives basically saying, "Hey, we're kind of behaving in two different ways for one company.... We need to get together; we need to talk about this."

It is significant that this issue arose at the business unit level rather than the senior executive-level, and it illustrates how public relations can serve as internal boundary spanners by sharing vital information across the organization. This example illustrates

what Burt (1992) referred to as a “network rich in information benefits” due to “contacts (a) established in places where useful bits of information are likely to air and (b) providing a reliable flow of information to and from those places” (p. 15). These types of networks have been referred to as “social capital,” and are considered a valued resource similar to financial or human capital, the latter referring to personal traits and skills (Burt, 1992). Social capital has been defined as “actual and potential resources embedded within, available through, and derived from the network of relationships possessed by an individual or social unit” (Nahapiet & Ghoshal, 1998, p. 243). Consistent with social capital theory, the public relations executives are providing a valuable service by filtering information, keeping others up to date on opportunities and warning them of potential crises (Burt, 1992).

Limited Internal Boundary Spanning Role. In contrast to companies B and D, the internal boundary spanning activities at Company A (franchising) were more limited in scope. Employees typically communicate with others in their corresponding role working for another brand. For example, a brand president would talk with another brand president or a public relations manager would talk with another public relations manager working for another brand. As a marketing executive said:

I would say with the unique thing here is that you have someone who has your role in another brand. And those sort of become informal decision groups. The presidents get together and have a presidents meeting every month. But we have marketing and PR team meetings ... even them informally calling each other and going what did you do about this situation, what should I do...that happens all the time, because you have the same roles within the same campus.

This type of sharing across brands recently led to the development of a cross-brand philanthropy effort. As a marketing executive explained:

Our initiative (philanthropy)... came out of a PR initiative that a specific brand did. There was one brand that took it upon themselves, and they made a donation ...a year before the rest of us all joined in. And so they saw the success from their one year doing it and then at the top (corporate level), it was decided all the brands would participate.

While sharing information with someone in a corresponding role with another brand can be a valuable information exchange, public relations executives' internal boundary spanning activities at Company A were limited, because they only participated on decision teams at the brand level and a marketing committee at the corporate level. This finding suggests that excellence in internal boundary spanning is connected to the use of integrated decision teams at multiple levels in the company that bring together executives from a range of different disciplines.

Constraints Limiting Internal Boundary Spanning Role. While Companies B and D demonstrated the expanded and essential role that public relations can play as an internal boundary spanner, the public relations executives also identified some constraints they face in performing this role such as time and lack of formal power to address the issues they identify. The first constraint that was mentioned by one of the corporate communications executives is the challenge of keeping up with the sheer number of multiple formal coalitions due to time and staff limitations. As one corporate communications executive said:

I, for instance, am on a distribution list that comes out ...anytime they're going to make a change like a product change or change that affects the employees or the members and I have to sort of scrutinize those to figure out which efforts we need to be a part of and have a voice in So I would say ... we're certainly invited to be a part of all those discussions; we just can't.

This statement implies that being an effective internal boundary spanner requires discernment in identifying which coalitions are most essential, and it appears that decision is frequently made by corporate communications executives based on the potential of the decision to impact the company's reputation. As one corporate communications executive said, "We have a very strong voice regarding anything that is believed to have a reputation impact – negative or positive."

The time constraint on coalition participation has previously been identified by Berger (2005) along with the challenges presented by shifting venues and the existence of multiple check points during the review process. Another constraint that public relations executives at the division leadership level or below may face is a lack of formal power to address issues they have identified through internal boundary spanning. As one public relations executive said:

We realized that our business leaders were listening to us, but we didn't have the ball all the way punched into the end zone, and that we were going to have to exert more influence to get this stopped.

At this point, the public relations executives resorted to forming informal coalitions due to limited formal power. Nevertheless, public relations can serve an essential role as internal boundary spanner. The conditions that support that role include public relations' inclusion on integrated decision teams at multiple levels throughout the organization, as well as departmental meetings that encourage sharing of intelligence gathered through those leadership roles.

Role of Informal Coalitions

When formal power is limited, public relations practitioners are using social influence strategies such as forming allies and coalitions (Raven, 1992). Contrary to

previous theory (Eisenhardt & Bourgeois, 1988), informal coalitions did exist in companies where public relations had a direct reporting relationship with the CEO and where the organizational structure included integrated decision teams. Informal coalitions are connected to internal boundary spanning due to the fact that public relations executives serving in leadership roles at the division level identified issues at their level, but they lacked the formal authority to address the issues. For that reason, they reached out to people with more senior positions in the hierarchy as allies or formed coalitions with influential company leaders from a variety of departments.

Informal coalitions were present in all four companies and were used by public relations executives positioned in lower levels of the organization as a means to increase their power and influence. Several factors were associated with the formation of informal coalitions such as proximity of offices, similarity of functions and shared experiences. The participants also identified the variety of locations where informal meetings occur. It all begins with a skill that one public relations executive referred to as “thinking horizontally.” He said:

Informally, I had to work very aggressively, horizontally across the enterprise to get people to buy into my ideas, to support my ideas. And in many cases, I ultimately learned that I needed to let go of my ideas and let somebody else take them ... We joke about we don't care how we get the ball in the end zone as long as we score.

Why Coalitions are Formed. Part of thinking horizontally and even vertically involves political astuteness in being able to identify who are the key influencers for a given decision, particularly those with veto power. At one of the four companies, multiple allies were recruited due to their formal authority by corporate communication executives. As one of these executives explained:

We went to other influencers inside the company ...and just asked them to start asking questions, and the rest of it took care of itself, but we needed people in positions of higher authority than us...We also realized that our influence sometimes has limitations, and so we had to find – we had to educate others and get them as fired up about it as we were.

This example supports the positions of Murnighan and Brass (1991) that informal coalitions are used when employees do not have the formal power to change the organizational independently, and that those with veto power are among the first persons contacted for participation. A second reference to the use of allies as a strategy for more influence involved a public relations manager convincing a marketing manager to raise the same concerns to their immediate boss. As she said:

I went to my director or marketing and voiced my concerns and the marketing manager went during her meeting with our director as well to let her know that “Hey, we also saw this.” We were both ... went from two different angles of the concerns we had, hers from the marketing side, mine from the PR side.

Factors Associated with Informal Coalitions. Data analysis revealed key factors associated with the selection of allies and informal coalition partners. The participants often chose to collaborate with those working in similar functions such as investor relations, marketing and government affairs. They also tended to communicate with those whose offices were next door and those with whom they shared experiences such as attending the same university. A corporate communications officer said:

We office right next to each other. And because IR (investor relations) and PR are linked, and so there’s this constant back and forth between us on how to position an issue and how to explain it, what to include in a news release versus

what to include in a conference call, etc. So there's lots of - it's partnering and teaming.

A human resources executive also spoke about having an office next to the public relations director, which spurred informal conversations. He said:

We're right next door to each other. If we've got questions or issues he's working with, I'll help him out when I can ... We share a lot of similar experiences, we went to the same college, and we're a few years apart in age, and know people in the community together, so it's (a) very good relationship that I have with (PR director).

These findings regarding who employees seek as informal communication partners are consistent with coorientation theory in that people tend to ally with those whom they interact frequently and with whom they feel comfortable such as those in nearby offices and with similar job titles and responsibilities (Eisenhardt & Bourgeois, 1988).

Locations for Informal Coalition Meetings. Participants at all four companies described the location of where informal meetings often occurred, and coffee shops were a frequent choice. This first description involved a concerted campaign. As one senior officer said:

Not email. Over lunch, catching people at the Starbucks. We have two Starbucks inside here. I got some work done down in the fitness center; we have four fitness centers, and in drive bys or texting ... and saying, "I need to catch you on something. Can you call me on your drive home?"

Some of the informal conversations simply involve a stop by a colleague's office, a morning visit at the coffee shop, or going for a walk or run with a colleague. A second account fits this more routine form of informal communication:

An example of that is when (SVP of corporate communications) and I (SVP investor relations) would sit down over Starbucks at 7 in the morning and just say, “Hey what’s going on in your world today? What are you expecting?” And so then issues would come up and we would bounce ideas off of each other, and I always found that that was a really good way to start the day.

Public Relations’ Management of Social Media

The second essential competency associated with public relations is their management of social media, which was characterized as “online reputation management.” Several informants suggested the rise of social media is increasing public relations’ power and influence in their companies. This finding is significant, because industry leaders just a few years ago suggested the issue regarding which function should manage social media was still up for debate (Solis & Breakenridge, 2009). At that time, Solis and Breakenridge (2009) criticized both public relations and marketing for doing more talking than listening when it comes to social media and declared that it was time to “put the public back into public relations” and “have real conversations with people” (p. 31-32). They also suggested that organizational structure and the individual practitioners’ expertise would be the determining factors regarding which function would oversee social media (Solis & Breakenridge, 2009). Based on the comments of the public relations informants, it appears the practitioner’s expertise has played a role as some described the technical aspects they have mastered. As a public relations manager said:

I understand the SEO (search engine optimization) side of the website and the content and how that works, the online listings and the link building and all those different elements of SEO. I’m so engrained in that from the beginning that I’ve built that in my current role as PR specialist, so I’m usually a resource...when it

comes to those kind of things, particularly YouTube videos and a lot of social media.

While junior public relations practitioners are expected to know how to use and communicate using social media, at the senior executive-level, this role involves more strategic responsibilities such as monitoring and managing the company's online reputation, planning and responding to crises, and helping to develop social media policies for employees. In all four of the companies studied, social media management was led by public relations, which they said is the ideal. As one corporate communications executive said:

Social media is inside of corporate communications for two reasons – one is if you put it inside of marketing, it would serve marketing's purpose; marketing's purpose is drive revenue and sell products. If you put it in the customer care, customer care is all about taking care of customers. If you take it outside of those two organizations, it serves a higher purpose.

What is this higher purpose? The public relations executives typically referred to their role as managing the brand and reputation, which is central to public relations' oversight responsibilities for social media. "Consumer-based brand equity occurs when the consumer is familiar with a brand and holds some favorable, strong, and unique brand associations in memory" (Keller, 1993, p. 2). Related to brand equity is corporate reputation, which has been defined as "a collective representation of a firm's past actions and results that describes the firm's ability to deliver valued outcomes to multiple stakeholders" (Lyon & Cameron, 2004, p. 215). Reputation is considered to be "owned by the public," while image represents how the company wants to be viewed (Lyon & Cameron, 2004, p. 215). Public relations' reputation management role has been referred to as issues management, which is defined as the "proactive process of anticipating,

identifying, evaluating, and responding to public policy issues that affect the organizations' relationships with their publics" (Cutlip et al., p. 19). The issues management role has been divided into five core components: predicting potential problems, anticipating threats to the organization, minimizing surprises, resolving any issues that do arise, and preventing crises (Wilcox et al., 2003). All five of these components would be consistent with the management of social media. Consistent with this issues management role, a senior corporate communications executive described how they have a team of employees monitoring social media throughout the weekends. He said:

I have people on my team who are plugged in monitoring the news and social media – the shift begins 7 p.m. Friday night and continues until 10 o'clock Sunday evening. And so they spot an issue that's popped up on a couple of blogs on Sunday morning at 9:30, I get a call, we make a decision... and communicate it out to the bloggers and we're able to kill a negative story that if we would have waited another two hours, would have been on the CBS evening news Sunday night. And so that's just the world in which we live.

To fulfill this online reputation management role, public relations executives need to understand monitoring tools, search engine optimization, customer relations, and be able to train others in the organization to use social media responsibly. At one company, corporate communications executives were helping to draft new policies to allow employees to communicate on behalf of the company in social media channels. As one corporate communications executive said:

We see our employees as very influential, and we are actually going to allow them to participate officially in social media, so we plan to change our social media policy to even make that possible. We've had to get buy-in from our senior

leaders to get comfortable, somewhat comfortable with the fact that our employees will be talking about (company name) in that social media space like Twitter and Facebook.

While social media has elevated the role of public relations in the organization, it has also contributed significantly to the work load. As one public relations manager said:

I spend three to four hours a day on social media. I mean that's why I end up working 14 hour days is because a year ago, I wasn't doing 3 to 4 hours a day on social media.

These findings regarding social media management are consistent with those of Breckenridge (2012) who has identified multiple strategic roles for public relations associated with social media such as policy maker, pre-crisis doctor and reputation task force member. Public relations practitioners who aspire to advance to more senior leadership roles in their organizations need to master the strategic competencies associated with the management of social media.

External Boundary Spanning & Advocacy

Another essential service provided by public relations is associated with their external boundary spanning roles, which include an information processing role and external representation or advocacy (Aldrich & Herker, 1977). The information processing role involves gathering information from the external environment, then interpreting and communicating that information internally. Consistent with the information processing role, the public affairs executive at Company B pointed out how critical it is for them to have someone from their department on the scene during a crisis in order to have influence. She said:

If we don't, I don't have someone to feed information back and then we're no longer a part of the decision making... In order to influence, I had to have information to bring to them.

Informants also pointed out that this information processing role requires tailoring communication based on the needs of different internal audiences, which means sending someone a text, email, or providing a short verbal summary in the hallway depending on their personal preferences. This responsibility also requires senior executives to be calm under pressure. A VP of marketing spoke about the importance of the delivery, she said:

Making sure that I was not preachy at all or panicked when we seemed to be going down the wrong path, but rather intercepting and saying let me help you make your decision by giving you facts on what the member (customer) is likely to do if you do that. Staying calm.

The second type of external boundary spanning is external representation or advocacy, a responsibility which was fulfilled by corporate communications when the chairman made the decision to seek to acquire a competitor through a merger. The role of corporate communications and government relations included developing messaging and communicating with public officials and the financial media about the benefits of the merger. As a senior executive said:

Clearly with a big strategic deal like that, how it gets communicated from minute number one really can set the tone for how the public policy folks receive it, how in my case, investors received it, and how the bloggers would receive it...It was important to us that we have our messages out there, that they be strong and consistent.

This advocacy role requires advanced communication skills in order to ghostwrite key messages for the chairman or CEO. It was actually an investor relations executive who best explained this specialized skill. She said:

The higher up you go in a company ... the words, the fewer and more pristine. And when you're dealing with corporate communications...they're word experts...And I think the higher up you go, the more strategic you become, the more thoughtful you have to be about the precision of the words that you use and there's a lot of work that goes into getting that just right. And ... there is a pretty fine line...that separates the people who do it extraordinarily well from those who are just ... pitching words on a page.

While previous scholars have identified the external boundary spanning and advocacy roles, it is clear based on the accounts of the informants in this study that these roles can be effective in increasing public relations' power and influence at the senior executive-level. In this study, one public relations executive described how his strong ghostwriting abilities actually trumped formal reporting relationships. He said:

The chairman, has a huge, huge appreciation for language and every exact word and so when it comes to his speeches, his quotes, his letters to employees, we work directly with him...because that structure on paper doesn't add any value when it is language intensive or timely, reputation impact, the story is breaking...We've got 30 minutes to get back to the New York Times...In that case, we don't follow any hierarchy.

For this reason, it appears external boundary spanning and advocacy are distinct contributions of public relations that provide justification for their involvement in formal and informal senior executive-level coalitions.

Stakeholder Analysis

A fourth service identified and valued by the senior executives that public relations practitioners perform is stakeholder analysis. This role involves identifying the most critical audiences and their communication needs for a given issue, predicting potential public reaction and developing alternatives based on those scenarios. As one senior executive described:

Brainstorming all the different alternatives in all the things that could happen, that might happen, and how we would proactively deal with it, so you've got ... Plan A, Plan B, Plan C...based on how the message actually gets received.

The stakeholder analysis role also includes determining when to respond and when not to. While this responsibility is broader than the management of social media, technology has added preeminence to this responsibility. As one senior executive said:

He's (SVP of corporate communications) always got incoming bombs all the time. Because especially now with the media coming from bloggers and coming from social media that in addition to TV and online and all different places. So knowing which of those to react to immediately and which of those to just let lie...is another big skill set that corporate communications brings to the table. And you know you can't respond to everything. You have to be strategic about that as well.

It is likely that public relations executives making these types of decisions consider the factors mentioned by scholars of power, legitimacy and urgency when choosing whether or not to respond and to whom (Mitchell et al., 1997). Consistent with this type of analysis, Cancel, Cameron, Sallot and Mitrook (1997) wrote that organizations would likely be more willing to listen to an external public that is "likely to greatly affect an organization, such as a government regulatory organization, than a

public that is unlikely to have a great effect on an organization, like a small group of protesters outside an organization's building" (p. 49). The primary stakeholders typically mentioned by the informants were customers, employees and government officials, and then secondary stakeholders typically included shareholders, the media, communities and advocacy groups such as the NAACP and LULAC.

FACTORS THAT ENHANCE OR HINDER PUBLIC RELATIONS' POWER & INFLUENCE

When comparing companies where public relations has a more influential role with companies where public relations has a weaker influence, a few characteristics emerged as critical in creating an environment that is supportive of public relations. These factors included Theory Y management style, the organizational reporting structure, internal relationship building, other senior executives' perceptions of the role of public relations, and organizational characteristics that are consistent with an ethical business climate. In contrast, marketing dominance and encroachment decreased the power and influence of public relations, especially when combined with Theory X management style. Each of these factors will be discussed in the context of public relations' power and influence.

Impact of Management Style: Theory X or Theory Y

The first factor that emerged from the data that impacts public relations' power and influence is the management style of the company. The organizational structure and culture at Companies B (energy) and D (financial services) are consistent with McGregor's Theory Y management style, which is characterized by decentralized management, autonomy and the use of cross-departmental teams to solve problems (Bowen, 2004; Redmond & Trager, 1998). The use of cross-departmental teams at these two companies was an essential factor that enabled public relations executives to serve as

internal boundary spanners. As an example of the use of integrated decision teams, one of the executives described how the marketing council at his company was comprised of some departments that traditionally might not be expected to weigh in on marketing issues:

We have a marketing council...we don't have a vice president of marketing corporate... All the divisions have marketing VPs and then we have other people that serve on this council... You'll have people in there from engineering. We do have marketing functions within the business units, so there would be marketing representatives from that group and public affairs always has at least one spot on there. You'll have some people from operations.

Both Companies B and D used integrated committees that included representatives from all the major departments including public affairs or corporate communications, which allow for a range of perspectives. The size of these committees typically ranged from 15 up to 30 active members, which greatly increases the odds of public relations having a seat at the table.

In organizations like these characterized by decentralized management, expertise and competence are considered better predictors of decision involvement rather than formal authority, such as titles, meaning those who are "most qualified to contribute to team decisions are the ones who will be involved" (Bunderson, 2003). In support of classifying Company B as Theory Y management, a division president said, "I tend to value the people far above what title or department they come from; you know, what's their ability to contribute." As further support for a de-emphasis on formal titles and roles, a division president at Company B proudly described how an engineer was leading a philanthropy effort in the company. He said:

Look everybody has an opinion ... We have a public affairs effort right now that's going to be around this year's election. But it's ... helping the ... food bank. And the guy that's leading it is an engineer. Perfect example of it.

Another practice reported at the same company that demonstrates the company's de-emphasis on formal titles is appointing employees in lower management positions to serve on and lead executive-level committees in order to train and identify future company leaders.

In contrast, Theory X management has been described as the "authoritarian command and control approach," suggesting that employees need to be "coerced, controlled, directed, threatened with punishment" in order to achieve company objectives (Redmond & Trager, 1998, pg. 43). The authoritarian leadership style involves top down decision making and power-distance relationship between the leadership and subordinates (Bowen, 2004; Redmond & Trager, 1998). In addition, centralized power means formal authority and standing in the hierarchy is preferred over expertise when determining decision team members (Bunderson, 2003).

At Company A, public relations managers described their organizational structure as top down decision making, which is more consistent with an authoritarian leadership style. As a marketing executive explained most of the time public relations is brought in at the implementation stage rather than at the beginning. He said:

Some of the decisions on whether or not to do something happen at those higher levels and sometimes PR is included in the front end – what if we did this – and sometimes it's included when it's made and what is it going to look like. That one was more of the second – we think we want to do this and then we include you in how do we develop it.

The top down decision making and weaker role of public relations was demonstrated through two specific accounts. While media relations and publicity are typically roles associated with public relations, at Company A, the marketing leadership actually provided strategic counsel in these areas as a central member of the decision teams when the company sought an opportunity to appear on a national TV show. An outside publicist, who also was influential during this effort due to her industry contacts, described the internal public relations staff's lack of involvement:

They (public relations) had no role in that, because everything was handled at the senior level between my agency ...and the CEO and the VP of marketing. The PR coordinators only knew to the extent that the franchise owners knew that there would be a team coming out and interviewing people.

The second example involved the conversion of a print publication into an electronic version to save printing costs. The decision to re-launch the publication in a digital form was made by the vice president of marketing. Despite the fact that the publication was described by several informants as a "public relations tool," the decision team was dominated by marketing representatives including the VP of marketing, director of marketing, project manager (marketing), and the marketing managers.

Based on the contrast of Companies B and D with Company A, Theory Y management characteristics appear to enhance the opportunity for public relations to be influential at the senior executive-level, particularly the use of integrated decision making teams and the emphasis on abilities to contribute rather than formal titles and position in the hierarchy. At Companies B and D, public relations executives were highly integrated in division level leadership teams and formal executive-level committees, which allowed them to gather intelligence and offer counsel in those meetings. In addition, public relations' participation in multiple leadership teams enabled them to play internal

boundary spanning roles, because they would then share the information they collected with the rest of their public relations team members.

Marketing Dominance and Encroachment: The Stepchild. While Theory X management appears to be a barrier to public relations' power and influence, this type of environment also is conducive to encroachment by similar disciplines, particularly when public relations serves a more tactical role. A key characteristic of Company A is what scholars have referred to as structural encroachment, when someone outside of public relations manages the function, in this case marketing (Dozier, 1988). Multiple respondents said the marketing leadership considers public relations a tool of marketing, more of a tactical rather than strategic function. Both marketing and public relations respondents said public relations is considered a bit of a stepchild in the organization. As a marketing executive said:

PR gets treated – I won't say quite like the stepchild or whatever, but you can tell a little less attention is played to PR, and that's strictly because you don't have that firm PR leadership person in.

A public relations manager used similar language when describing their role in the organization:

I think to really get to where we need to be, we need to be an equal part in the overall marketing strategy, which is how it's viewed here, and not just a stepsister, so to speak.

This statement by the public relations manager demonstrates how far the role needs to advance in this company due to the fact that she is aspiring to be involved in the marketing strategy, not the overall business strategy, which is a more limited role. At this company, public relations' weaker role may also be related to the youth and inexperience of the public relations managers. Most of the public relations specialists for the brands

are recent college graduates. In addition, the company only began employing public relations specialists just seven years ago. As a marketing executive explained:

We definitely skew young in the department. And whenever you go ok, here's our 20 something PR expert and here's our president and VP in their 50s. Whenever they make a decision and a 20 something has to object or kind of insert their two cents, it's a tough sell sometimes.

A public relations manager agreed that age is a factor as well as lack of assertiveness:

Part of it is because they're so many green people in the PR, while the marketing have been here so long as a whole. And some of the PR members...letting the marketing people lead everything without being vocal about it.

Another form of marketing encroachment at Company A is that marketing controls the budget meaning that most public relations managers have to go to the marketing manager to seek funding for their initiatives. However, there was one exception, the public relations manager who had the most seniority. She said:

I've kind of had to fight for this over the years. I now have a PR budget, but for years, I didn't. And now, I get to do social media contests and the winner gets a \$100 gift card, and it's been really great...But when I first came on board, nothing... And I would ask for money that I could do stats and surveys and things like that, because I thought it would be really relevant for our press release, and I was just told no.

Emphasis on Metrics. Another characteristic that emerged at Company A that further demonstrated the dominance of marketing and tactical view of public relations was the fact that public relations practitioners were expected to demonstrate their value through the use of metrics such as publicity value. The public relations managers recited these

metrics throughout the interview as justification of their true impact, such as “In 2011, we had more than 5 billion media impressions, and we had more than \$1 million worth, the publicity value” or “We had almost 3,000 stories published or written about us last year.”

However, one challenge in measurement is when different internal audiences request different metrics. A public relations manager explained the dilemma:

I mentioned three different decision making groups and each one wants different numbers. For my president’s and my brand standpoint, it’s more of a tone that he looks for, which is more what the franchisees see ... For our franchisees and our Ad Council, they want a direct correlation on numbers, because that’s affecting the budget.

The type of metrics that Company A is focused on include media impressions, advertising equivalency, and online metrics, which are considered weaker and more tactical forms of evaluation compared to more scientific and strategic measures such as pretests and posttests, which require measurement before and after a public relations campaign (Wilcox et al., 2003).

This emphasis on metrics to demonstrate public relations’ value stands in sharp contrast with Companies B and D. At company B (energy), a senior public relations officer said their employees do not have to justify their value:

They don’t need to justify and say ok, we’ve got this relationship. I know that they’re doing their job. There’s days that they’re out there and they don’t make a dime or they don’t influence anybody, but I’m not too worried about that, because I know long-term what it’s doing.

At company D (financial services), corporate communications does not focus on what they would call meaningless metrics such as media placements or impressions, but

they do focus on obtaining awards and recognitions with 51 received in the past year. As a corporate communications executive explained:

For us it's creating awareness, it's enhancing the brand, it's creating new relationships, and to measure those effectively you have to have the programs in place to do that. So you have to be measuring your reputation; you have to be looking at what types of awards you're winning. If you are winning those awards, are your members (customers) aware of those awards, because if they're not then why continue to pursue them if your members (customers) aren't even aware that you're winning those awards.

The metrics that are the focus of Company D require formal, scientific research methods such as surveys and focus groups while the metrics at Company A are more tactical in focus and easier to obtain such as media mentions, website traffic and the number of social media followers.

Organizational Reporting Relationships

At two of the companies, the President and CEO proactively took actions to strengthen and elevate the role of public relations in the organization within the past 10 to 15 years. In Company B (energy), this change was made so that public relations could better communicate on behalf of the company. A public affairs executive explained why this access was needed:

We wouldn't understand why the change was made. We were expected to go out and communicate it, but we didn't understand how they had arrived at that or why it was made. Now they communicate every step of the way. We're brought in from day one on everything.

At company D (financial services), the change was attributed to market forces, which demanded a shift from direct mail marketing to more proactive approaches to attract customers, so the CEO recruited new leadership. As a corporate communications executive said:

A new leader was brought in to run the department... so there was an intentional desire to bring somebody in who has built communications functions in the past, who had worked at companies that are accustomed to being in highly competitive marketplace battles.

At both companies in practice, the chief public relations officer reports directly to the President and CEO. However, in the organizational chart, public relations reports to the general counsel (Company B) or the executive vice president (EVP) of external affairs (Company D). At Company B, the senior public affairs officer said his boss actually verbally gave him permission to report directly to the CEO, as well as the second highest officer in the company. He said:

But literally (name of general counsel) came in the first day that I was here and said I know on the org chart you report to me, but at the time it was probably you really worry about (name of CEO) and (name of SVP of operations); don't worry about me, which is great.

At Company D, the strong role of corporate communications is tied to the most senior corporate communications officer's seat at the senior executive table (dominant coalition). As one corporate communication executive said about his boss:

She's still an executive vice president, so she is on that executive decision making team. She still has direct access to the CEO and while she doesn't report directly to him, she still is seen as his strategic counsel for those issues. She is ... still a part of that leadership team.

In contrast to these two companies, at Company A (franchising), public relations is positioned four levels removed from the CEO in the organizational chart. They report to the marketing director who reports to the VP of marketing who reports to the company president who reports to the CEO. Most of the time, the strategic decisions are made by the senior executive team or by the marketing leadership and then public relations counsel is sought for recommendations on how to implement the program, a more tactical rather than strategic role. While the internal public relations managers do not counsel the senior executive team, the CEO regularly consults with a public relations agency, which serves a publicist role. It is noteworthy that this agency relationship has existed for 20 years, but the company added internal public relations employees only seven years ago.

Ethical Business Climate

Another organizational factor that can impact public relations' power and influence is the ethical climate, particularly the company's commitment to transparency in communication and desire for long-term relationships with customers and other key publics. Ethical climate refers to dimensions such as behavioral norms, role models and historical anecdotes (Cohen, 1993). The first ethical characteristic that was identified was a commitment to transparency in communication. At Company D, a financial executive clearly understood and expressed that public relations was about accurate communication, not "spinning" the truth. He said:

I think there is a perception outside of our company that public relations is helping to ... defend bad actions or to keep companies out of trouble. My feeling is it's a little bit different at (company name), because of our core values, because of who we are, we worry about that less and we worry more about just making sure that our ... story gets told correctly.

In contrast to this environment of transparency, an executive at another company pointed to a specific example when the company chose not to be forthcoming with their customers about a poor performing service. He said:

We weren't willing to take the risk and be transparent with our customers, instead we were going to take the conservative route on that, and I think that conservative nature of our business comes out in our PR.

The senior executive further discussed this product performance issue and said they decided to "soft-pedal" the issue, because they did not want to create a crisis where one did not currently exist.

Another characteristic associated with an ethical business climate was the focus on reputation management in order to build and maintain long-term relationships with key stakeholders. As a senior executive said:

The culture really forces an interaction with public relations, because our mission is about facilitating financial security of the members for their entire lives, and if you're going to have a lifelong relationship with somebody, you better not make them mad.

For Company B, executives spoke about the preeminence of maintaining the viability of a company with a long history and good reputation that impacted the way they approached public affairs. As a division president said:

We're building relationships...Those are lasting relationships. You're not going to get a deal over on somebody and when they wake up 6 months later and say "man, they screwed me" ... We want to be fair; we want to be honest. And you build your company to last. We've been here a 100 years, and we hope to be here another 100 years.

This focus on reputation management and building and maintaining long-term relationships fosters an environment that strongly encourages leaders from other departments to seek public relations' counsel, thus increasing its power and influence. In fact, in one company not doing so could result in negative consequences. As one senior executive said,

I would say they are sought out many, many times and when they are not sought out and there's a bad response, folks can be – punished is probably the wrong word, but let's just say scrutinized.

Respondents at that company actually described a specific time when employees were terminated following a decision that was made that could have damaged the company's reputation, and they had not consulted corporate communications.

Consistent with this role of reputation management, informants at two of the companies described the formal research methods they use to listen to customers and employees, which is consistent with two-way symmetric communication (Grunig et al., 2002). At Company B (energy), customer feedback is obtained through a customer advisory board, focus groups, and membership and service on the board of the chamber of commerce in the various cities they serve. At Company D (financial services), they conduct both qualitative and quantitative research with their members prior to making major strategic decisions including communication message testing, and then once the decision is made, they conduct research to evaluate the member (customer) response. The commitment to listening was also demonstrated in their approach to employee communications at Companies B and D. Specific communication approaches included the creation of employee listening teams to receive feedback, and training front line employees to communicate with their peers as communication champions. As an indication of their strong employee communications programs, both companies had

recently appeared on prominent lists of best places to work. As an indication of the priority of employee communication, the President and CEO at both companies would hold town hall meetings with employees on a quarterly basis.

Another ideal characteristic discovered in one company was the recognition of public relations' role in providing counsel on ethical matters. A division president actually used the word "conscience" when describing the role of public affairs in his company. Specifically referring to the company's philanthropic and volunteer efforts, he said:

They're that front line; they're the face; they're our conscience. I don't want us to ever lose our compassion. And sometimes you become very desensitized ... I look to public affairs to really help remind me.

A corporate communications executive also suggested their role includes counseling senior management on the right action, which appears consistent with serving as an organizational conscience (Ryan & Martinson, 1983). This ethical counseling role would only be possible if a public relations executive was seated at the leadership table when issues were being discussed. He said:

It can be inside of the organization – by saying to leaders, "this is something that might look good on paper, might seem like a nice thing to do for our bottom line, but we cannot do that." And so having the conviction and confidence to throw red flags when necessary to insure that we don't make our own mistake.

The other characteristics consistent with an ethical business climate that were found at two of the companies were role models and historical anecdotes that demonstrated a strong commitment to transparency and use of traditional public relations responses to crises such as a willingness to apologize or take the blame. These examples stand in contrast to traditional legal responses such as saying nothing or as little as

possible and releasing it as quietly as possible (Coombs, 1995; Fitzpatrick & Rubin, 1995). These stories gave executives the confidence that if they raised concerns the company leaders would listen and choose the right action even if it was costly. One account involved a leader's response to a crisis; the public affairs executive said:

Our senior officer came right out and said, "Hey, this is our fault; we're taking full responsibility," which is a first. Legal was freaking out. "You can't do that." But it was the right thing to do, and believe me, it probably saved us millions in lawsuits in doing what we did.

The other scenario involved a strategic business decision. One senior executive praised the company leaders, which included the heads of the business units and financial executives:

They were the ones looking at the most immediate loss of profitability and yet they asked the scary question. They were the ones that did not seek out the easy solution... They had great courage and very thick skin to go there.

Another executive pointed out the financial impact of that decision, which was significant. He said:

That decision, which was driven by us, impacted the bottom line by between \$60 and \$70 million. To this day, even though it's impacting their bottom line, our presidents of those two units routinely thank us for bringing that to their attention and preventing them from making a huge mistake.

It is noteworthy that one of these accounts occurred at a publicly traded company. While the company has a reputation for doing the right thing, they also are known for their solid financial performance. As a division president said:

We have financial results, the scoreboard that's up there for everybody to see and if we're to remain independent and prosperous, we've got to deliver on results in

that regard as well. So how do we do all those things and do them in the right way.

At two of the companies, management had implemented programs to keep ethical principles salient among their employees such as reminders on their desks or requiring them to state them prior to meetings. As one senior executive said, “I can name any code of values in any order that you want and two-thirds of my team can do that.” As a result, the code of ethics is frequently used by employees to support their positions on issues in meetings. One marketing executive described this practice:

It’s used as a tool to do the right thing pretty frequently. So you know one of my favorites is asking a clarifying question if you disagree or do not understand. That comes up very often. We have one president who will include it whenever he or she is about to disagree with something.

While most companies do have codes of ethics, the distinction at these two companies is those principles are not just words on a paper, but instead are used as decision making tools.

In summary, the characteristics consistent with an ethical business culture that empower public relations include a commitment transparency in communication, a willingness to listen and balance the concerns of stakeholders, a long-term perspective on relationships, role models for ethical behavior, and renowned anecdotes regarding times when the company did the right thing, even at significant cost or risk (Ardichvilli et al., 2009; Bowen, 2004; Cohen, 1993). In addition, company-wide programs that constantly remind employees of ethical principles can also support public relations’ role in reputation management by encouraging everyone throughout the organization to do the right thing. These conditions create an environment where public relations executives have a strong influence on decision making.

Internal Relationship Building

While the first three characteristics are part of the organization's structure or culture, the fourth characteristic is dependent on the activities of the public relations executives, and involves relationship building inside the company. Public relations practitioners need to be proactively building relationships across the organization, which is emphasized at Companies B (energy) and D (financial services). These relationships are critical in order to have the ear of colleagues when serving on formal committees, as well as when recruiting allies or forming coalitions. As a public affairs director said at Company B said:

You can't force people to think of you first. So you have to proactively go in and be willing to assist them and just be there for them and show them how helpful you can be to them. I see a lot of public relations people that are sort of snobbish that ... act like oh, "I'm the big TV guy ... and I don't have time for you people." We try to be the opposite, and we try to go in and show them our interest by going to them... "How can I be of help to you, what can we do, what are your issues, what are your problems, how can I help you with them."

A corporate communications executive at Company D explained the groundwork they are doing to build internal relationships. She said, "We're doing some training and house calls to try to help people around in our businesses know when to engage us." As further support for the need to build internal relationships as a precursor to providing strategic counsel, a corporate communications executive said about a more senior executive, "I have a relationship ... where he says if you see us ever where you think we're going to do something stupid or wrong, I expect you to tell me."

Kennan and Hazelton (2006) discussed the importance of public relations practitioners building internal relationships and pointed out that "knowing whom to talk

with about what is important” (p.284). Scholars have also pointed out how these relationships can lead to referrals. Burt (1992) suggested that personal contacts in a network may mention someone’s name at a critical time and open new opportunities for that person to be influential.

Others’ Perceptions of Public Relations Role

The next factor is related to internal relationship building and involves educating others about the role of public relations. Social influence is dependent in part on others’ perceptions, which involve role-taking or “looking at or anticipating another’s behavior by viewing it in the context of a role” (Biddle & Thomas, 1966, p. 151). Scholars suggest these role conceptions include perceptions regarding what is appropriate or inappropriate behavior (Turner, 1956). Public relations practitioners who want to be influential at the senior executive-level must build credibility, be perceived as competent by others and develop trust (Miller & Levine, 1996). For this reason, it was appropriate to examine how other senior executives perceived public relations’ role.

First of all, the senior executives were asked about the ideal location for public relations in the organizational chart, which is one indication of its perceived value. Most of the senior executives supported having public relations report to the chairman or at least one step away, but one marketing executive said public relations should report to marketing, an example of dissensus with public relations executives. She said, “I would move marketing and corporate communications together reporting to the president, as a member of the executive committee.”

In contrast, a brand president expressed the desire for a direct reporting relationship, a view that reflects consensus with public relations executives. She said:

It definitely should have at the very least a dotted line to the president. I talk to (PR manager) almost every single day... I talk to her because I need her advice on something and other times she comes to me because she needs the vision, and so we work hand in hand. I think that when you see leaders that are not involved in that what you see – you often see a garbled message go out.

As for public relations' responsibilities, at one company multiple marketing executives supported public relations leading the management of social media, another area of consensus. A VP of marketing said:

All of those activities run through our communications people, and it's their responsibility... I definitely see the role morphing into handling more and more of the social media space, and the opportunities that are brought about from that. And I think it's definitely different than maybe what we saw social media being a year ago in that the interactions with customers on a one-on-one basis, is something that more and more organizations are seeing as a valuable interaction.

This statement in support of public relations management of social media is critical, because this competency was also identified as one of the essential services that public relations can provide at the senior executive-level. Other responsibilities that were valued by senior executives from disciplines outside of public relations included traditional public relations roles such as communicating positive messages about the company, handling crises, and communicating with consumers in an authentic way. As one executive described:

To me, it's communicate your brand message; help you communicate it in a way that resonates with the consumer on a very authentic level not advertising-wise... And then second, to help with those kind of PR events that may not be good PR

events where you need somebody who understands how to talk to the media, because I think the worst thing anyone can say is “no comment.”

One of the executives said that public relations’ role involves making sure the company’s story is told in an accurate way. He said:

One of the roles is effective communication with our members (customers) and then also ... trying to make sure that our story is translated correctly to the public. It’s not so that we are looked at in a good light.

At another company, the other senior executives viewed public affairs’ roles as building relationships with city leaders in the communities they serve, and as shaping the way the company is viewed both internally and externally. A senior investor relations executive viewed corporate communications as a “partner at the table,” and someone who can think strategically and then put that strategy into messages for the public.

These perceptions indicate that internal relationship building can lead to a more accurate picture of the role of public relations and support for its presence at the senior executive-level. However, it was also clear that some work remains to be done as some marketing executives said that public relations should report to their department and viewed it more as a tool of marketing.

Times When PR Was Excluded or Not Included in an Optimal Way. It is instructive to examine exactly what senior executives perceive the ideal role of public relations should be. However, perhaps even more enlightening is examining decision processes when public relations did not play a central role, but public relations executives believed they actually should have. The examples demonstrate others’ perspectives in practice as they discuss who should or should not be included in decision teams.

The senior executives from three of the companies expressed difficulty in identifying strategic issues when public relations had not been included due to their

companies use of integrated decision teams; however, at all four companies public relations executives commonly classified a type of decision they would not be a part of as operational decisions. Examples of these types of decisions included an information technology project, types of services the company should provide, personnel decisions such as the selection of a new senior officer, investment allocations and staffing levels. One public relations manager said an example of an operational decision that she was unaware of was a new service the company was adding. She said:

I was completely out of the loop on it until someone asked me about it, and I was like “I have no idea, let me find out.” And then I called and sure enough we did do that, but I didn’t even know about it.

A public affairs manager shared how what could be considered an operational issue, a routine repair, turned into a minor crisis that then required public relations involvement. A crew was doing routine maintenance and was not able to finish the work, so they secured the site and planned to complete the work the next day. However, the weather did not cooperate. As he said:

The only thing is we didn’t plan on a 4-inch rain coming. So we have an excavation site, and here’s a 4-inch rain and it happens to be in a street where all the water ran into our excavation site and this particular city had had the sewer replaced a year before by a contractor. Well, the contractor didn’t properly bed the soil around the sewer pipe and the street literally opened up.

The next day, the public affairs manager was out of town to attend a meeting at the company’s headquarters and was not notified until the media arrived at the scene. He said:

I didn’t know anything about it until 2 o’clock that afternoon, I get a call from one of the operations supervisors, and he says... “We need you ... because the media’s

on site” and then he starts explaining to me what had happened. And I said, “Well, when did we know that street parted or the earth parted?” He said, “Oh, about 9 o’clock this morning.” And I said, “Why didn’t you call me at 9 o’clock this morning?”

While public relations executives say they are often excluded from participating in operational decisions, one public affairs executive argued that they should be more involved in these types of issues as an advocate for consumers, a role consistent with external boundary spanning and stakeholder analysis. She said:

PR folks should be the ones most in tune or arguably among those most in tune with the consumer or with the customer. And ... bringing that perspective into the development of products and into the development of procedures and policies needs to be a stronger discipline in PR. So not just talking about the products and processes and policies, but being a part of actually crafting them and developing them, part of the intelligence that goes into that front end...And I think that’s sorely lacking in most companies. And I think our company has a long ways to go in that.

Another example shared by one corporate communications officer involved an employee not following proper protocol regarding announcing a possible technology security concern. The company had identified a potential security issue and a team had been established that included the chief security officer, the chief privacy officer, the head of the network and corporate communications. Corporate communications’ role was to determine what message to communicate to the media and employees. However, the next day, the chief security officer sent out a notice to employees without clearing it with the rest of the team. The corporate communications executive said,

It was like whoa, “I thought we were together on this”... You have people trying to do the right thing, but they forget the right process to go through to do it. So it was no ill will, nothing intentional. It was just teams in a big complex company people sometimes don’t adhere to process or the proper governance.

Another example provided by a corporate communication executive fit this pattern of not following proper protocol. The business development team only notified corporate communications about a new partnership the very evening the announcement was going to appear in a prominent publication. As a corporate communications executive said:

We found out about this at 6 o’clock on a Friday night; it was going to be in ... the printed edition and online edition overnight. And nobody knew what the heck was going on except for the business development lead.

Once corporate communications was notified, they began investigating who had made the decision and addressing questions from their customers about the new partnership. When asked why corporate communications was not included earlier, one informant mentioned that those responsible for the decision were eventually terminated. He said:

I would like to ask that individual, but he’s no longer here. To be honest, I think they were given some leeway in developing some relationships to drive business results, and they did not clearly understand the implications of getting out into the public space. I think it was a lack of awareness on their part as to the value that PR could bring to this campaign they started.

A third type of category of issues where public relations would not play a central role that emerged is issues that are considered outside their domain, which in one case proved to be an error in judgment. The specific issue involved the launch of a new

employee wellness program. While this was a company-wide initiative, the informants specifically discussed its implementation at the division level. To control rising health care costs, the company offered their employees free health assessments and a weight loss program. Because it involved employee health, it was initially viewed by management as a human resources issue. However, the email that HR sent out was not effective in convincing employees to participate in the program. As a public affairs director said:

I think a lot of our employees were resistant to going through the metabolic screening, because they knew they weren't going to pass. And it was one of those things where ignorance somehow made it – deniability possible...Initially the results – the participation rates for the metabolic screenings was terrible.

In this specific example, the public affairs director was aware of the new program, but did not initially see any reason to get involved. He said:

Everybody involved in the initial decision making was just so impressed with the commitment of the company as far as the money it was spending on these surveys and this medical effort...that we just didn't see that it might not be received as eagerly by the rank and file employees.

The public affairs team then developed strategies to communicate to employees how their health impacted their families through videos, articles in employee publications and company meetings. The public affairs director said:

What we did was we went back and we convinced people by pointing out that it's not just them involved. I mean we're talking about their families, their dependents, the people that depend on them to have their job; they're completely dependent on them for lifestyle. And we wanted them to be as healthy and as

well as could be. Once we started communicating it from that perspective, participation rates shot up.

From these specific accounts, it is clear that the times when public relations may need to employ social influence strategies and tactics include when it involves operational issues, when other departments are not following proper protocol, and when the issue is perceived as outside of public relations domain.

Think like a GPS

The final factor that impacts public relations' power and influence is the practitioners' depth of understanding of business operations and integration of public relations activities with the core business objectives. One public relations executive articulated how critical it is to focus on those big issues and not be distracted by less significant matters. He used the analogy of a GPS system:

The problem is you can get lost in saying, "Oh gosh, we have all these different news releases and news events"...And in and of themselves, the numbers may be impressive, but if you're not driving to a destination that's clearly marked, it's kind of aimless work. It's like starting a new trip; GPS tells you where you are, you key in where you want to go, and then there's a shortest route to get you there. You always need to be thinking like the GPS: where am I trying to go?

"Thinking like a GPS" involves connecting the dots regarding how public relations' activities relate to and can support the company's core business objectives and operations. Fortunately for public affairs executives at one company, one of those business priorities, referred to internally as "blue chips," is image building, a responsibility closely associated with their profession. The division president said:

We...have 6 areas of focus this year that our team worked up that – we call it blue chips, but areas of additional focus that we really... need to improve. Well, one of them is image building....We've been trying to build our local brand name and image here at a stronger level than it's been in the past.

At one company, being connected to company objectives and the bottom line means public affairs is highly involved in negotiating new rates with elected officials at the city and state levels. The public affairs executive said:

That's the only tangible that we have. We can point to the fact that we were successful in getting rate cases approved, which has been our bottom line dollars. If we didn't have that tangible piece, and we weren't connected to where they rely on us to go and negotiate these rate cases, I could see our value diminish greatly, because they wouldn't have as much interest. But when it hits the bottom line, they have more interest. So if you find ways that you can impact the bottom line, people take more of an interest.

At that same company, external relationship building is also a way they are tied to the company's objectives. A VP of operations shared a story that to him demonstrated the value of public affairs in this company. An operations crew was performing maintenance work when a member of the city council stopped by. The VP of operations described the value of relationships:

And on a Saturday, a rainy Saturday, we were out repairing or trying to repair a leak and they had a water leak on top of the pipeline and the water was actually running into our pipe, and it was causing issues. Well, the city would not do anything; they would not send enough people out because it was a weekend. and it was overtime...This council woman was driving by and she stopped...and started talking to us and we told her that we were waiting on the city ...She

picked up the phone and contacted the city, the head of city water department, and before we knew it, we had a full crew out there to repair their water leak, so then we could fix our issue. It's just one of those things that in the past, she probably never would have stopped. She definitely wouldn't have talked to us, but because of that relationship, it helps operations.

These accounts are consistent with the strategic contingencies' theory of intraorganizational power, which suggests those who provide services that are central or essential to the primary workflow, or perform tasks associated with the collective goals of the organization will be more influential (Hickson et al., 1971). It appears that the strong influence of public relations at Companies B and D may be related to their recognition and participation in the companies' key business objectives referred to as "blue chips" at both organizations, as well as the fact that their public relations activities are tied to operations.

OTHER SOCIAL INFLUENCE STRATEGIES & TACTICS

In addition to forming allies and information coalitions, senior executive use a variety of social influence strategies and tactics to be more influential including taking advantage of travel opportunities to raise issues with senior executives, conducting research to support a position, volunteering for tasks, participating in cross-training, using self-promotion techniques, and demonstrating respect for confidentiality. These approaches were discussed by senior executives from a variety of disciplines on a general level rather than limited to public relations and are applicable to anyone seeking more power and influence.

Traveling with the President

At three of the companies, public relations executives mentioned that they often travel with either the chairman of the company or the division president, which provides the opportunity to discuss business issues outside of formal executive committee meetings. Two of these accounts were from informants working at companies with an indirect reporting relationship to the chairman or CEO. As a corporate communications executive at one company said:

We get around it just by virtue of I travel with the chairman; he comes down to my office and we email 24-7, so we work around it... There is a direct working relationship; it's not on paper.

A similar relationship with the brand president was described by a public relations manager. She said:

When she (brand president) goes on business trips, she takes me along with her...And I went with her the last time she spoke, because she wanted me there to take photos, so I could help her with press releases and blogs to get the word out on that.

A division president also mentioned how business issues are discussed when traveling with the public affairs director. He said:

We could be in a car going down the road, and (public affairs director) and I often travel together when we're going and visiting some of our local legislators. ...and so when we're on the road like that, no telling what ideas or discussions or whatever will come up, so it happens pretty regularly, informal as well.

In one company, a marketing executive actually expressed concern about this type of informal communication occurring between the brand presidents and public relations managers without their knowledge, especially because the marketing department offices

were located in a different building than the public relations managers. The marketing executive said, “If they’re sitting close to their president, things will happen with the president that maybe you don’t want, because they can just walk down the hall and tell them.” This comment appears to be a subtle indication of marketing dominance and encroachment, which could hinder the internal boundary spanning role of public relations.

Conduct Research

Research associated with environmental scanning, both internally and externally, can be used as a source of expert power (Kahn et al., 1964). As one corporate communications executive said:

You need to be aware of what’s happening within your organization and outside of your organization. So I make it a practice myself to immerse myself in the trade magazines, so that I can keep up with what our competitors are doing, what major trends are ongoing in the business and oftentimes then sharing those news stories or those trends...with business heads...help them connect the dots, help them anticipate what might be coming down the road that we’ve got to prepare for.

Research in general can also be used to support your position and to demonstrate knowledge about the issues. As a marketing executive from Company D said when discussing her role in a strategic decision, “It was foundational. The research really drove the decision.” A marketing executive at Company A said she makes it a practice to conduct research prior to meetings. She said:

Doing the research prior to going into a meeting...I believe is a very good strategy in a meeting that you’re going to that you are not running, to research

anything ahead of time that could come up or that you might be able to offer during the meeting itself and it helps lend to the conversation and it also helps...give you an extra air of credibility ... because you have maybe more of a background of the issue than coming in blind.

Volunteering for Tasks

While not everyone will want to adhere to this next practice, one marketing executive had a reputation in her company for volunteering for tasks in meetings. One of her colleagues reflected on this pattern:

(Name of marketing director) tends to be a person who ends up with a lot of “to-dos” after a meeting, so does that make her more influential? I mean it’s nice to have a person who says, “Ok, I’ll take that. I’ll do that. I’ll take that.” So she, I would say thinking about all those planning meetings ... she probably took the lion’s share of a lot of the to-dos away from those meetings, which is great... that probably makes her a little more influential ... then she’s reporting back ... “Here’s what I did on this. Here’s what I did on that”...So I think there’s a correlation there between somebody volunteering to take that extra work on and then having some influence.

Value of Cross-Training

At one company, cross-training and thorough knowledge of the business is highly valued. New public affairs managers typically go through an intense training process, and specialized work gear is necessary. As a division president explained:

If you come to work with us in public affairs, we take the first year with you and we just put you through the ringer. You’ve got work boots; you’re going to have steel toe boots; you’re going to have a hard hat. You’re going to be in the field...

so that when you're standing in front of a camera, and someone sticks a mic in front of you ... you don't do this – “uh, uh.”

At that same company, employees often moved laterally in the organization learning about the various divisions before being promoted to more senior positions. As one public affairs executive said:

I've had a lot of experiences and a lot of different jobs, which really helped train me to have a good understanding of the entire company...So I always tell new employees coming in – everybody feels like they have to go straight up, but sometimes it's good to go sideways and learn all that you can, so that you're more valuable.

Self-promotion Techniques

Consistent with Raven's (1992) list of ways to set the stage for social influence, one senior executive used a form of self-promotion by displaying pictures in her office of herself with elected officials as evidence of the important work she is doing. She said:

See the pictures – it's to prove we're – it's almost like here you're proving – they just know you're gone all the time, and they know you're out there doing something, but what is the value of what you're doing. This is like a congressman, the mayor ... the former vice president of the United States, the governor. It's like we're really out there interfacing with these people. We're not just out there floating around. We're having an impact with regulators and elected officials.

Other forms of self-promotion that executives can use include displaying awards, diplomas and certifications they have received in their offices.

Don't Participate in Office Gossip

Another fundamental related to inclusion in senior executive decision meetings is learning to respect confidentiality. At one company, a public relations manager was known for her unwillingness to participate in office gossip, which appears to be correlated with her inclusion in a highly confidential business decision. As she said:

I don't talk about people. So when it comes to office gossip, I'm usually the very, very, very last person (to know). Interns usually know more than I do. Because people know if they come say something, I'm going to tell them to leave my office that I don't want to hear it.

Her boss then said in a later interview, "She was included. She was probably one of the only PR people, but that's because she is very trusted. They know she knows how to handle herself."

Insights Regarding Social Influence Strategies & Tactics

The public relations executives working in indirect reporting structures spoke about how travel opportunities with the President or CEO provided more access than they were typically granted in the workplace. Over time, this access can potentially lead to referent power (Kahn et al., 1964), which typically develops over time as public relations executives develop working relationships with their bosses. In addition, the findings also suggest public relations' use of expert power. The tactics that were being utilized by senior executives in this study that were consistent with expert power included information they obtained from research and self-promotion (Raven, 1992). Other effective practices they discussed included volunteering for tasks, gaining knowledge through cross training, and not participating in office gossip.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION & CONCLUSIONS

This study provides four distinct contributions to the theory and practice of public relations. The first theoretical contribution is identifying that public relations executives serve an essential role as an internal boundary spanner, a form of informational power. Related to this first finding, the second contribution is that excellence in public relations requires public relations' membership in formal coalitions at three distinct levels in a corporation: the dominant coalition or senior leadership team, the brand or business division leadership teams, and executive-level committees. It is through public relations' integration throughout these various leadership roles that intelligence can be gathered to fulfill the internal boundary spanning role. The third contribution is the recognition of online reputation management as an essential service that public relations performs at the senior executive-level, which actually is comprised of three strategic roles. The final insight is that public relations executives do form alliances and informal coalitions as a means to increase their social influence at the senior executive-level, and informal coalition building was found in both companies with strict adherence to hierarchy and those with decentralized management, a finding that contradicts previous theory.

Public Relations Serves as an Internal Boundary Spanner

The first contribution to theory is public relations' role in internal boundary spanning. Boundary spanning theory in public relations has typically focused on practitioners' external boundary roles such as external representation and advocacy (Aldrich & Herker, 1977); however, it is clear that public relations executives can play an essential role internally as well and the literature appears to be deficient in recognizing and defining how public relations fulfills this internal role. Internal boundary spanning was examined in a limited role (Company A), referring to public relations managers

sharing ideas with their counterpart working for another brand, and a more comprehensive role. Participants at two of the companies described this expanded role in practice, which was characterized as connecting the dots and sharing information across departments as well as up and down the hierarchy. This role was only possible due to public relations' participation on senior leadership teams at the brand or division level and executive-level committees. Then at regularly scheduled public relations team meetings, executives would share updates with their colleagues serving in these leadership roles across the corporation allowing issues to be examined from a company-wide perspective. It was through this broader lens that public relations executives identified proposed company actions that were contradictory and needed to be addressed, and this intelligence empowered them to provide strategic counsel. It was also enlightening that the public relations executives at two of the companies had open staff meetings often inviting their colleagues from other departments to attend as consultants, demonstrating the truly collaborative culture. While internal boundary spanning by public relations was found in Company A (franchising), which exhibited characteristics associated with Theory X management, it was more limited in scope suggesting that excellence in internal boundary spanning is dependent on Theory Y management, which is associated with the use of cross-departmental teams to solve problems (Bowen, 2004; Redmond & Trager, 1998). For this reason, it appears public relations' internal boundary spanning role is more likely to be found in organizations consistent with Theory Y management.

The essential services described by the informants, such as internal boundary spanning, do require strong communication skills, but are more strategic in nature than responsibilities traditionally associated with entry level practitioners, which supports Moss' et al. (2000) view that roles assumed by senior public relations officers are distinct

from entry level and even mid-management positions. The first service discussed, internal boundary spanning, appears to be a novel contribution to public relations theory as most literature is focused on public relations' external boundary spanning roles. The closest theoretical contributions identified were a discussion on social capital theory in the context of public relations (Kennan & Hazelton, 2006), and a brief discussion regarding the need for public relations to have extensive internal networks (Edwards, 2009). The concept of internal boundary spanning also is missing in leading public relations textbooks. While this role could also be assumed by other senior executives, it is clear from the specific examples provided by the public relations executives in this study that intelligence gathered through internal boundary spanning, a form of informational power, was one way they effectively increased their power and influence in the company.

Internal boundary spanning was highly connected to building internal relationships or employee communications, which merits additional research. Internal relationship building can be examined from the perspective of social capital theory. Public relations executives need to develop contacts that provide access to meetings where useful information is likely to originate (Burt, 1992). Two crucial factors are associated with social capital: access, which involves being able to receive valuable information; and timing, which requires being informed earlier than others in your network, so that your counsel is valued (Burt, 1992; Nahapiet & Ghoshal, 1998). As internal boundary spanners, public relations executives were also serving an information processing role by deciding who needs that information and then translating it in communication with senior management (Aldrich & Herker, 1977). In the examples provided, public relations appeared to be spanning a "structural hole" in the organization (Burt, 1992), which refers to network benefits are additive rather than overlapping; in other words, they are providing new rather than redundant information. Timing of

information is crucial, as Burt (1992) pointed out, “personal contacts can make you one of the people who is informed early...before the average person receives it,” (p. 14) which can increase someone’s social capital. Research in this domain should explore public relations’ internal boundary spanning role and their development of internal relationships as a means to increase social influence, topics which were both discussed by informants in this study.

Researchers interested in conducting research related to public relations internal relationships should note that while public relations executives at all four companies in this study listed employee communications as one of their primary responsibilities, that role is not always recognized by their colleagues in other departments. As a specific example in this study, the public affairs director at one company did not initially play a central role in the launch of an employee wellness program, which was perceived by senior executives as a human resources issue. Control of employee communications has been identified as potential area for conflict and encroachment between public relations and human resources, but collaboration is considered necessary since “internal relationships inevitably reverberate externally” (Cutlip et al. 2006, p. 70). For these reasons, additional research should be conducted to better understand public relations’ role in internal communications.

Public Relations Needs a Seat at Multiple Tables

The second contribution this study provides to public relations theory is providing support that excellence in public relations not only requires a seat at the table of the dominant coalition, but also at the brand or division level as well as on influential, formal executive committees. The data suggests that public relations scholars and industry leaders’ traditional focus on acquiring a seat at the dominant coalition could be

characterized as “tunnel vision,” as two of the public relations executives clearly articulated that their perspectives have evolved to endorse public relations’ participation in leadership at all levels of the organization. Some of the factors that were found to enhance public relations opportunity to play this more influential role included Theory Y management, organizational reporting relationships, and characteristics associated with an ethical business climate such as a commitment to transparency in communication, use of formal research methods to listen to key stakeholders, a focus on building long-term relationships, and the existence of role models and historical anecdotes (Ardichvilli, Mitchell, & Jondle, 2009; Bowen, 2004; Cohen, 1993).

Consistent with Theory Y management, Companies B (energy) and D (financial services) used integrated committees that included representatives from all the major departments including public affairs or corporate communications, which allows for a range of perspectives. Because the size of these committees typically ranged from 15 up to 30 active members, it improved public relations’ odds of being included among the decision team members. In addition, there was a de-emphasis on formal titles and placement in the hierarchy and more focus on ability to contribute when assigning people to committees. Consistent with models of excellence in public relations, at both companies the public relations function was separate from marketing and reported directly to the President and CEO in practice (Grunig et al., 2002). These companies also were committed to two-way symmetric communication (Grunig et al., 2002) as demonstrated by their use of formal research methods such as focus groups and message testing to listen to their customers. In addition, the companies were focused on reputation management and approached relationships with a long-term perspective with a desire to build a company that lasts throughout the generations and to continue customer relationships for a lifetime. This focus on reputation management fostered an

environmental that strongly encouraged other departments to seek public relations' counsel before making strategic decisions. In support of the value of a good reputation, scholars have identified a potential halo effect suggesting that good reputation may act as an insurance policy in times of crises, (Lyon & Cameron, 2004; Klein & Dawar, 2004) meaning loyal customers are more likely to engage in biased information processing such as resisting or discounting negative information (Cleeren, Dekimpe & Helsen, 2008; Ahluwalia, Burnkrant & Unnava, 2000; Ahluwalia, Unnava & Burnkrant, 2001).

Consistent with scholars' descriptions of an ethical climate, both of these companies (B and D) had role models and historical anecdotes of times when the company chose to do the right thing, even at a high cost (Cohen, 1993). It is also significant that characteristics associated with the ideal were found in both stable and turbulent environments, as well as publicly traded and privately held companies. Scholars have suggested that public relations would likely be more powerful in turbulent environments, a position which is not supported in this study (Cutlip et al., 2006; Moss et al., 2000). Instead, the powerful role of public relations appeared to be first, more associated with the strong support of the Chairmen or CEO, who created a direct reporting relationship for public relations; and secondly, public relations' immersion in operational issues and the key business objectives identified by the company. The second characteristic is consistent with the strategic contingencies' theory of intraorganizational power, which suggests that departments that perform services that are central or essential to the primary workflow of the organization will be more powerful (Hickson et al., 1971).

In sharp contrast to Companies B and D is Company A (franchising), which was characterized by marketing dominance and structural encroachment, as well as a focus on metrics in order to prove the value of public relations. Even the most senior public relations manager was positioned four levels below the CEO, and reported to the

marketing director. At the same company, public relations executives referred to what they called “top down decision making,” which is more consistent with an authoritarian or Theory X leadership style. They were typically brought in after the decisions had been made to discuss implementation or tactical issues. Because of their lack of formal power, public relations executives serving in this type of environment may need to master social influence strategies and tactics in order to impact business decisions.

Although the focus of this study was on the general role of public relations at the senior executive-level, the informants discussed some of the ethical issues they faced such as whether or not to raise fees as a means to improve the bottom line, whether or not to accept responsibility for a crisis, and how to treat a fellow colleague who publicly makes a mistake, as well as the role of internal codes of ethics in decision making. They also pointed out the influence of informal cultural elements such as role models and historical anecdotes (Cohen, 1993). Two of the informants spoke specifically about ethical responsibilities associated with public relations, such as “throwing red flags” or fostering compassion toward those in need. All of these issues should be further examined by probing deeper into the themes that emerged from this study. Berger (2005) said regarding the dominant coalition and ethics, “There are gaps in the literature between what ought to be done, what prevents it from getting done, and how it might get done” (p. 22). While this study did offer some insights about ethical deliberations at the senior executive and business unit levels, additional research in this area is needed.

Public Relations’ Management of Social Media

A third contribution of this research is the identification of online reputation management as one of the essential services provided by public relations at the senior executive-level, which is broader than mastering the technical aspects of using social

media channels. It encompasses traditional issues management responsibilities along with crisis communications and developing social media policies. In addition, the management of social media requires collaboration with other departments such as marketing, customer service, legal and information technology. Three distinct, strategic roles were identified that are associated with this responsibility: monitoring and managing the company's online reputation, planning and responding to crises, and helping to develop social media policies for employees. At all four companies, social media was placed under the primary responsibility of public relations even if they do collaborate with other departments. This finding is significant, because just a few years ago industry leaders discussed how both marketing and public relations were claiming responsibility for social media (Solis & Breakenridge, 2009). In this study, multiple marketing executives acknowledged public relations' role in managing social media, as this statement indicates, "They (public relations) really do manage their (brand's) reputation online. Every single day, they set up alerts."

As the centrality of social media increases in business communication, this role offers great potential as a means to increase public relations' power and influence in the company. Consistent with the strategic contingencies' theory of intraorganizational power, management of social media is associated with coping with uncertainty by monitoring online conversations to identify any potential issues, and providing services that are central or essential to the primary workflow of the organization, considering that social media is a means to talk directly to consumers. The management of social media is also connected to public relations' external boundary spanning roles, which include environmental scanning and advocacy, as well as stakeholder analysis. These responsibilities entail being able to identify the most essential stakeholders, their potential responses and then develop response plans. While these competencies are clearly distinct

responsibilities, external boundary spanning and stakeholder analysis are definitely proficiencies that are interconnected to the management of social media. Senior public relations executives clearly do use social media as a channel to advocate the position of their companies, and bloggers and consumers using online communication channels are definitely among the stakeholders considered in their analysis. However, as strategists, senior public relations executives must continue to apply their expertise in a more holistic manner recognizing that social media is just one communication channel among many.

One of the more encouraging signs for public relations' power influence included statements by public relations executives about how online reputation management has elevated their role and standing in their companies and provided new opportunities for influence and collaboration at the senior executive-level. Even in Company A (franchising) where public relations was primarily valued for its publicity role, public relations managers spoke about how their role has expanded with the rise of social media. As one public relations manager said:

It's also made us much more visible to not just our franchise owners but our operation and corporate team as well. Whenever somebody references me...She's our social media expert; she's our guru.

The findings related to social media management and its ties to reputation management suggest that in corporations with strong public relations influence, their role will be perceived as tied to reputation management rather than publicity.

These findings suggest several opportunities for future research that have implications for the discipline of public relations. While the focus of this study was a broader look at the overall role of public relations at the senior executive-level, the informants described more specifically their responsibility in managing social media, which involved three distinct components: issues management, crisis management and

policy development. However, a prominent industry leader has suggested there could be as many as eight strategic roles associated with the management of social media (Breakenridge, 2012). Additional research should be conducted to fully identify the exact number of roles associated with the management of social media and which of these roles are assumed by public relations or other departments, as well as the competencies that are required to fulfill these responsibilities.

Public Relations Executives Do Form Informal Coalitions

A fourth contribution of this study is the examination of public relations practitioners' use of informal coalitions. The findings of this study confirm previous theories regarding the factors that are associated with selecting coalition partners; however, the hypothesis that less coalition formation would be found in Theory Y environments, characterized by decentralized decision teams and where the CEO was characterized as consensus style, (Eisenhardt & Bourgeois, 1988) was not supported in this study. Informal coalitions were found in both Theory Y and Theory X environments. These coalitions were formed by employees at lower levels in the organization, who lacked formal authority to address issues that arose through internal boundary spanning activities. In one specific account, public relations executives identified the need for building a coalition through issues that arose based on intelligence gathered at the division level; those serving at that level connected the dots regarding related business decisions happening in different business units. Because those executives possessed limited formal power due to their positions in the hierarchy, they sought out allies with more formal authority in the company. This example clearly demonstrates how those with less formal power can use social influence strategies such as coalition building and invoking higher authority to impact business decisions. However, senior executives must

possess political astuteness in identifying who the key decision makers are and be aware of their agendas (Berger, 2005). Consistent with previous research, several factors were associated with the formation of informal coalitions such as proximity of offices, similarity of functions and shared experiences.

The findings also demonstrated how even public relations executives who do not report directly to the President or CEO can take advantage of business travel opportunities to discuss issues and build a relationship with the most senior officer in the company. Other social influence strategies and tactics included conducting research to support a position, volunteering for tasks, participating in cross-training opportunities to learn the business, and using self-promotion techniques.

Based on the findings from this study, it appears that the formation of informal coalitions by public relations will more likely be found among employees at the division level or lower due to lack of formal power. For this reason, researchers interested in studying informal coalitions should focus on employees in mid-management positions who have limited access and authority. While this study examined the locations of informal coalition meetings (where) and factors associated with informal coalition partners (whom), additional research should be conducted related to *when* executives perceive the need to create informal coalitions. The specific example from this study involved business units making contradictory decisions, which was discovered by public relations executives serving in leadership roles at the division level. Researchers interested in this area of study will also want to examine the use of social influence strategies and tactics that were found in this study as a means to increase one's power and influence.

Implications for Educators and Professionals

The senior executives provided insights for educators and professionals regarding key competencies that public relations practitioners need to master and strategies they can employ to be more influential at the senior executive-level. Among the competencies is advanced communication skills such as ghostwriting talking points for the CEO or President, which requires a precise understanding and use of vocabulary. Ghostwriting is one area where educators and professional associations may want to offer additional training. This skill is much more advanced than writing a news release or feature story. It requires an in-depth understanding of the company's business objectives and operations, and then knowing how to position and communicate those messages in a precise manner. One of the senior public relations executives even described how mastery of this competency can override formal reporting structures. This requirement for public relations practitioners to understand business objectives and company operations so that they can communicate more effectively provides additional support for business management concepts to be included in public relations curriculum (Kinnick & Cameron, 1994). Another advanced communication skill that senior executives described involved choosing the right channel based on the preferences of internal senior executives and then delivering that information in a calm, professional manner. This competency suggests that instruction in interpersonal skills and organizational communication would also be valuable for public relations students.

A second area that deserves further attention is public relations' roles in internal environmental scanning and boundary spanning. When research skills are taught in the classroom to public relations students, it is likely taught in a manner focusing on the need to gather information about external publics. However, a new competency discussed by the informants focused on gathering information about internal business decisions and

then having the critical thinking skills to “connect the dots.” While these skills likely are developed over years of experience and may be more challenging to teach in a classroom setting, public relations curriculum should include a discussion of the profession’s role in internal environment scanning and as an internal boundary spanner along with the responsibilities that entails.

While the teaching of social media technology skills is prevalent in universities and professional associations’ workshops and conferences, a third competency that emerged from this study is the management of the company’s online reputation. This responsibility involved activities such as monitoring media, consumer, and activists’ conversations; planning and responding to online crises; and helping to develop social media policies for employees, who are charged with communicating on behalf of the company. While some of these areas may already be taught by educators and professional associations, there may be gaps or areas where this training should be enhanced.

In addition to these competencies, educators and professionals can benefit from the insights provided regarding the strategies that senior executives are using to increase their influence. While it is no surprise that research would be a form of expert power, some of the other techniques may not be as intuitive. Some of these approaches included volunteering for tasks and cross-training, which may require a willingness to move laterally within the company to learn the business. A more subtle approach involves self-promotion, such as displaying pictures with prominent people or awards and certifications in the office. One of the more valuable insights involved looking for ways to contribute to business objectives, referred to as “blue chips” in two of the companies studied. At one company, public relations is responsible for negotiating rates with cities and states, which contributes to the bottom line; in addition, these relationships with elected officials have been credited with making operations work easier. The final advice

provided was to respect confidentiality, so that people at senior levels can trust you with sensitive information.

While this research provided new insights into the role of public relations at the senior executive-level, the sample was limited to four U.S. companies. Further research should be conducted in other countries and utilize additional research methods such as surveys, focus groups and ethnography. Similar to this study, the research should include the perspectives of senior executives from a variety of disciplines.

This research demonstrates that public relations is performing a vital role at the senior executive-level in both turbulent and stable environments, and how they are functioning in that role in both direct and indirect reporting relationships. Among the more valuable and influential services public relations is providing is internal boundary spanning, which is consistent with building social capital. By building internal relationships and serving on various leadership teams, public relations practitioners can gather intelligence from throughout the company and then share that information with other senior executives to help them make better strategic decisions. However, they can best fulfill that role if they are invited to sit among decision teams at multiple levels in the organization.

Appendix A

CONTENT ANALYSIS OF NEWS COVERAGE FOR ONE MONTH

Subject of News Coverage	Company A	Company B	Company C	Company D
Competition			7	8
Financials		4	9	17
Business	8	10	15	42
Philanthropy/ Community Relations	2	5	1	8
Politics			1	12
Leadership		2		2
Litigation				25
Company Briefly Mentioned	9			51
Honors/Awards	3			18
Company Announcement				26
Union			6	
Crisis		14		
Total	22	35	39	209
Percentage of Turbulent Stories	0%	40%	33%	16%

A subscription to electronic alerts based on the name of each company generated 305 stories in one month related to the four companies. These stories were coded based on the subject matter of the story. If the company was just mentioned as a source in a story that was not necessarily just about them, it was coded as “company briefly mentioned.” An example of that type of story would be one focused on providing general

consumer tips. In contrast, a story that was generated based on a study released by a company would be coded as company announcement.

In classifying a company as turbulent or stable, the researcher looked at both the type and number of stories related to topics such as crises, competition, litigation, and unions. While Company D had the most news coverage, most of it was positive (84%) such as company announcements, honors/awards, and information about its business in general due to proactive public relations efforts; the one exception was a story about an intellectual property dispute with a vendor that received considerable media attention. In contrast, Companies B and D were featured in stories related to crises, unions, and competition, with 14 turbulent related stories for Company B (40%) and 13 turbulent related stories for Company C (33%). Company A received the least news coverage and most it was due to proactive media efforts related to new programs it had launched or honors it had received. It should be noted that while two of the companies (B and C) are heavily regulated by the government, only the story about Company C classified as politics fit that type of content; the stories coded as politics for Company D involved a campaign stop by politicians seeking votes.

The content analysis of news coverage was just one factor considered when classifying the companies as turbulent or stable. Other considerations were whether or not the company was in an industry heavily regulated by the government and responses by the informants regarding characteristics about their specific industries.

Appendix B

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL - PUBLIC RELATIONS OFFICER

Warm-up:

I would like to begin by asking you to please tell me about your history in this organization. How long have you worked here and have you held any previous positions in this company?

Role of Public Relations

When you agreed to talk with me, you said you were willing to discuss the role of public relations in general and in this organization in particular.

1. I'd like to begin by having you describe the role you think public relations ideally should serve in an organization.
2. Would you say this description describes reality in your organization at this point in time or not?
 - Prompts: If not, why not? What do you think would need to change in your organization to enable public relations to fulfill what you've just described as the ideal role?
 - Prompts: If yes, what do you see as the key factors that enable public relations to play this role? Has it always been this way? If not, why not? What do you think enabled public relations to evolve to this role?
3. I'm interested in how key senior executives in this organization view the role of public relations. Would you please name the individuals that you see as being the key executives and then elaborate on how you think each one views the role of public relations.

Executive Coalitions

Now I'd like to understand more about how important decisions are made in this organization.

4. Researchers have suggested that there may be multiple executive-level groups or decision-making groups that operate in a given organization. The idea is that the composition of the group of senior leaders who get together to solve a problem may vary based on certain factors such as, for example, the nature of the problem.

The groups may be formal or informal. Have you observed different decision making groups in this organization?

- Prompts: If so, would you please tell me about the executive-level groups, either formal or informal that you have witnessed? Which ones are you most likely to be invited to participate in and why? Which ones do you perceive that you are most likely to be excluded from and why?
5. What do you believe public relations practitioners can do to play the role that they should play?
- Prompts: Are there services that public relations practitioners can provide that will help them gain access to senior-executive groups? Are there any specific strategies that public relations practitioners can use to gain more access to these groups?

Past Issues of Executive-Level Decision-making

Now I'd like to talk with you about specific times when you were included or excluded from executive decision making.

6. Can you give some examples of times when you were included in executive decision making in a key way? Can you give some examples of times when you were not included and you should have been?

Now I would like to talk with you about two specific examples of strategic issues that are not merely communication issues that your organization has faced during the past several years. I would like for you to select the situations that we discuss. One of the issues should be one when you played a crucial role, and the other a situation when you were excluded or not involved in an optimal way.

7. Please think of a recent strategic issue that your organization faced that you played a crucial role in addressing and describe it for me.
8. Who were the key players in that decision, and who do you think had the most influence?
- Prompts: Why do you think that each of these individuals had substantial influence?
 - Were there multiple decision groups or just one?
 - If more than one, describe them and their functions.
 - What was your role in this situation? Did you use any strategies to gain more influence?
 - If so, please describe your approaches.

- Did this issue involve any concerns about what was the right thing to do?
 - If so, please describe the type of concerns and how they entered the senior executives' discussions.
9. Now think of a second strategic issue that your organization faced when you were excluded from deliberations or not optimally involved and describe it for me.
10. Who were the key players in that decision, and why do you think each were included?
- Prompts: Who do you think had the most influence? Why do you think that each of these individuals had substantial influence?
 - Were there multiple decision groups or just one?
 - If more than one, describe them and their functions.
 - Why do you think that you were not included? Can you think of anything that you could have done to gain influence?

Wrap-Up Question

11. Is there a question that I should have asked you that you'd like to address that would be beneficial to this study?

I'd like to thank you for participating in this study. If you have any additional thoughts or questions, feel free to contact me by phone or email.

Appendix C

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL - SENIOR EXECUTIVES AND CEO/PRESIDENT

(Note: Wording will vary slightly in some sections to be more appropriate to the role of CEO.)

Warm-up:

Tell me about your role in this organization.

1. In what types of senior executive decisions are you likely to provide counsel, and how would you characterize the scope of your involvement?

(CEO Warm-up: Tell me about how you became CEO/president of this organization.)

Role of Public Relations

I would next like to discuss the role of public relations in your organization because I'm interested in public relations' involvement in organization problem solving.

2. How would you describe public relations' role in your organization?
3. Does this description fit what you would describe as the ideal role for public relations or not?
 - Prompt: If not, what would you change?
4. How do you think your senior public relations officer would describe the ideal role of public relations?
5. As I mentioned earlier, I'm interested in the nature of public relations' involvement in organizational problem solving. Could you give me some examples of times when you think that public relations should be included in problem solving and when it should not?

Executive Coalitions

Now I'd like to understand more about how important decisions are made in this organization.

6. Researchers have suggested that there may be multiple executive-level groups or decision-making groups that operate in a given organization. The idea is that the composition of the group of senior leaders who get together to solve a problem may vary

based on certain factors such as, for example, the nature of the problem. The groups may be formal or informal. Have you observed different groups in this organization? (CEO version: Have you personally created or observed other senior executives use of different groups in this organization?)

- Prompts: If so, would you please tell me about the executive-level groups, either formal or informal that you have witnessed? Which ones are you most likely to be invited to participate in and why? Which ones do you perceive that you are most likely to be excluded from and why? (CEO version: Which ones do you choose not to participate in or delegate to others and why?)
 - Which ones is public relations most likely to be included in?
7. What can public relations practitioners do to enhance their opportunity to play the role that they ideally should play?
- Prompts: Are there services that public relations practitioners can provide that will help them gain access to senior-executive groups? Are there any specific strategies that public relations practitioners can use to gain more access to these groups?

Specific Examples:

I would next like to talk to you about a couple of recent strategic issues your organization has faced (identified previously by senior public relations officer as one in which public relations was included).

(Interviewer will describe issue one) What was your role in this situation?

8. Who were the key players in that decision, and why do you think each was included?
- Prompts: Who do you think had the most influence? Why do you think that each of these individuals had substantial influence?
 - Why do you think public relations was included? How would you describe the role of public relations in this situation?
 - Were there multiple decision groups or just one?
 - If more than one, describe them and their functions.
 - Did you use any strategies to gain more influence?
 - If so, please describe your approaches.
 - Did this issue involve any concerns about what was the right thing to do?

- If so, please describe the type of concerns and how they entered the senior executives' discussions.

(Interviewer will describe the second issue, one in which public relations was not included) What was your role in this situation?

9. Who were the key players in that decision, and why do you think each was included?
 - Prompts: Who do you think had the most influence? Why do you think that each of these individuals had substantial influence?
 - Why do you think public relations was not included? Is there anything the public relations officer should have done to increase his/her influence regarding this issue?
 - Were there multiple decision groups or just one?
 - If more than one, describe them and their functions.
 - Did you use any strategies to gain more influence?
 - If so, please describe your approaches.
 - Did this issue involve any concerns about what was the right thing to do?
 - If so, please describe the type of concerns and how they entered the senior executives' discussions.

Wrap-Up Question

10. Is there a question that I should have asked you that you'd like to address that would be beneficial to this study?

I'd like to thank you for participating in this study. If you have any additional thoughts or questions, feel free to contact me by phone or email.

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